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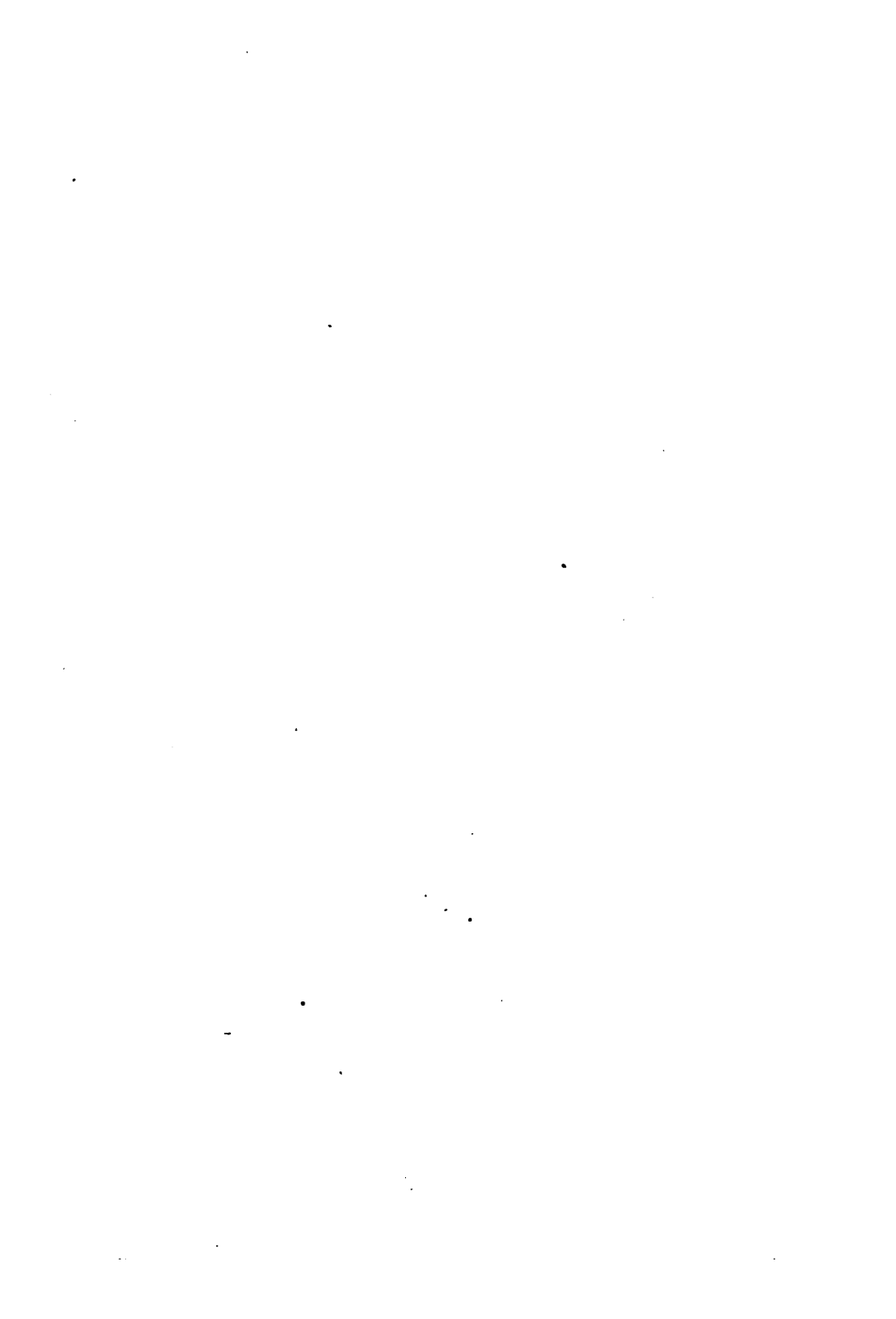
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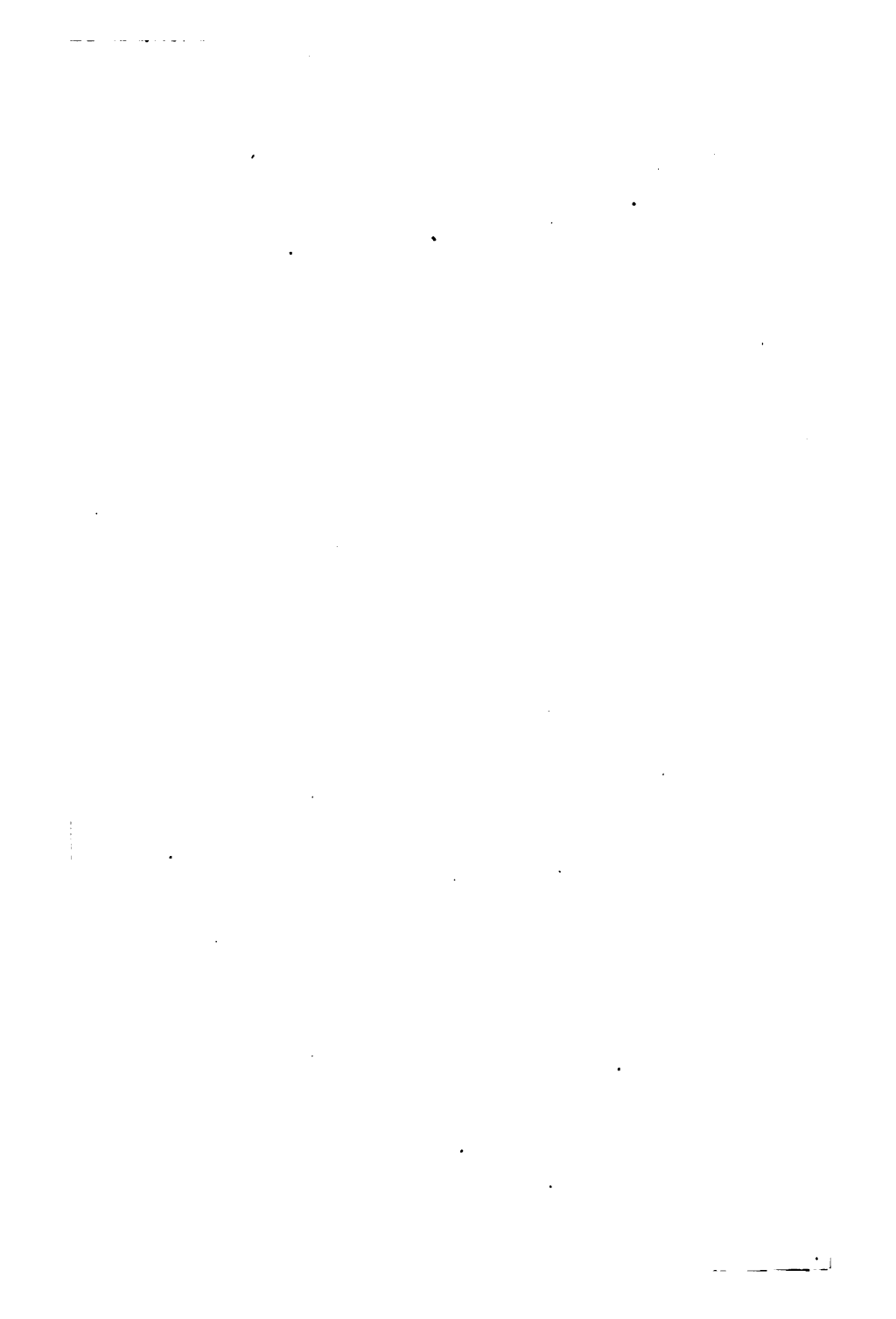
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ANGUS GRAY

VOL. III.



ANGUS GRAY

BY

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AUTHOR OF

'SCARSCLIFF ROCKS' 'ANNIE AN EXCELLENT PERSON' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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ANGUS GRAY.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

‘GRAY’S BEST FRIEND!’

L BUT it was only his consciousness of the truth kept back that made Mr. Eveleigh imagine that it was possible that Nell could doubt his word. It never for a moment occurred to her to do so, as she sat by him while he made a valiant effort to partake of the good things Moore had prepared for him, and listened to his short account of the events of the night with breathless interest.

‘How horrible! to hear the man cry, and not to be able to help him. Where was Mr. Curgenwen? Oh! my dear! what a dreadful night you have had!’ she exclaimed, not for the first time, as he concluded. ‘And they could not find him? Have they any idea of who the man could be?’ she asked.

‘I thought I said that it was one of the coast-guard,’ Mr. Eveleigh answered with some confusion.

‘You said a man fell over, and that you had roused the coast-guard to look for him. Moore tried to frighten me this morning by a story she heard——’

‘What did she hear?’ asked Mr. Eveleigh quickly and anxiously.

‘That Angus Gray was smashed all to pieces so as there was not a morsel of him left and the sea had swept him all away!’ Nell answered, mimicking Moore’s way of

speaking and laughing, though she was pale, and there was a slight tremulousness about her laugh.

Mr. Eveleigh looked at her in surprise.

'I did not think you were heartless, Nell!' he answered gravely.

Nell's cheek grew paler still and a sort of horror came into her eyes.

'Heartless!' she repeated; 'heartless! because I laugh at a story that I *know* is not true.' She spoke vehemently as if to assure herself.

'How can you know?' asked her father, surprised still more at her vehemence.

'Because I saw him last night quite late, and he was going home. And besides, do you think Angus Gray would fall over a cliff in that way? It *could* not be Angus Gray!' insisted Nell.

'“You saw him last night, quite late!”' repeated Mr. Eveleigh slowly, a light of

anger coming into his eyes ; ' how was that, Nell ? '

Something in her father's tone sent the blood back to Nell's cheeks, but she did not show any other sign of confusion, and answered at once.

' I drew aside the curtain to look at the night when I was waiting for you, and I thought I heard a footstep, and then the moon shone out and I saw it was Gray, and I was afraid he had come to tell me—I don't know what—but you know you said you would not be late—and the sight of him made me nervous, and I went out to him.' For a moment Nell hesitated.

' Well, and he wanted what ? ' asked her father quietly.

' Nothing,' said Nell ; ' he assured me nothing had happened.'

' And what was he doing there ? '

' Taking shelter from the storm,' said

Nell, colouring violently, as she remembered that he was standing in the rain on the steps when she saw him.

But her father accepted the explanation without further comment, and fell to thinking of the way in which Gray had avoided the question he himself had put to him as to where he had been, when he appeared at the gate of the station-houses as the other men were setting out to look for him. And then his mind reverted to his own absorbing misery and its connection with Gray; and he seemed to hear him say with the earnestness of conviction, ‘and you thought it was *me*, sir,’ and involuntarily he muttered the once carelessly-spoken comment on Angus as if it comforted him now,

‘I could trust that man with my life!’

And again Nell answered softly, as she had answered once before,

‘Yes, you could trust him always.’

But this time there mingled with her conviction of his trustworthiness a vague fear of some need for that trust; and a remembrance of the horror with which her father in his sleep had spoken his name brought with it some indefinite alarm that she could not put away from her.

‘Who was the man, do they think?’ she asked presently, and as Mr. Eveleigh did not speak, but appeared to have become forgetful of her presence, she went to him, and knelt down beside him, and repeated her question, adding gently,

‘I am not heartless, papa, though I could not help being glad to think that it was nonsense about Angus Gray.’

Mr. Eveleigh looked at her, and a shiver passed over him.

‘It might have been Gray,’ he said with an evident effort; ‘it appears that he and another man changed turns to take the beat to Culve. A man named Joe Mutter.’

‘Joe Mutter!’ exclaimed Nell sorrowfully; ‘oh, papa, and he was Gray’s best friend!’

Mr. Eveleigh’s face could scarcely have grown whiter, but as he looked at his daughter a sort of ghastly horror came over it. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but no sound came. Twice he tried to speak, and at last he repeated in a hoarse whisper Nell’s words, ‘Gray’s *best friend!*’

‘Papa, papa!’ said Nell, alarmed, ‘this has tried you too much, dear. But you know you could not help it; you *know* you could not, father darling,’ and the girl in her longing to comfort him, took his hand and pressed it against her lips and cheeks. He snatched it away almost rudely, but the next moment he put his arms round his child and rested his head against hers, while something very like tears slowly gathered in his eyes. She did not see them, but she felt acutely that he was miserable, and that she

was not much comfort to him; and even in her sorrow for his grief it surprised her. Its excess was curious in her easy-going, rather selfish, by no means affectionate-hearted father. She could understand that he had had a shock, but it did not seem natural to her that he should take the melancholy death of a man to whom he was absolutely indifferent, so very much to heart. He did not speak to her again, and presently took his arms away, and gently putting her from him went away to his own room.

There had been a time when Nell would have followed him, and striven to comfort him; or at least, she now thought that there had been such a time, and grieved to think that it was past. But, as a matter of fact, Nell had never before seen her father in serious trouble; and though she was quick to recognise that it had in some way come to him now, she was quite inexperienced in the

special treatment requisite for suffering that was of the mind and not of the body. She felt herself to be ignorant of its very nature ; for the sad fate of poor Mutter, though she grieved over it herself for Angus Gray's sake, could not possibly be very overpoweringly distressing to her father. Neither could she comfort herself by believing that his nerves had received a shock too great for them, for she had always, rightly or wrongly, believed him to be a man of unusually strong nerve. No ; it was a painful impression that she could not shake off, that her father's face had twice conveyed to her that morning ; but she felt that he *feared* something or somebody. And do what she would to crush the thought she could not hinder herself from recalling that each time that look of dread had crossed her father's face it had been the mention of Gray's name that had called it forth. As she

sat alone that morning, and thought of these things it darted through her like a sharp pain that her father had never directly confirmed her assertion that nothing could have happened to Gray. Could it be that a double misfortune had happened that night, and that it was this that had unnerved and broken down her light-hearted father? Nell started to her feet and turned quickly to the door, opened it, and scarcely conscious of her actions crossed the passage to the little study, and the next moment was in her father's presence.

'Papa!' she began hastily, and then stopped in confusion and dismay, as he turned round and saluted her entrance with an audible expression of intense impatience, and yet, as she could see, he was doing nothing, absolutely nothing but sitting in his arm-chair by the fire with his feet on the fender; not a sign of a book in his hand,

of a brush or a pen; the newspapers lay untouched on the table. She had barely time to notice these things, before he had recovered himself and had stretched out his hand to her.

‘I beg your pardon, my Nell, I thought it was Moore again. She has been in to look at me twice on one excuse or another as if I were a wild beast. I suppose she has been hearing the gossip of the tradesmen, and looks upon me in the light of — of — a hero!’ he said, after a second of hesitation and with an odd sort of laugh.

Nell put her hand in his, but she shrank from the sound of his laugh and could not echo it.

‘Well, Nell!’ he asked, more in his ordinary way, ‘what can I do for you? my child, you are as white as a ghost,’ he added, jumping up from his chair, and putting her into it quickly. ‘Are you ill, my Nell?’

he asked, tenderly bending over her and forgetting everything else for the moment.

‘No, ill! no,’ she answered, trying to laugh, but it was a weak attempt; ‘but you frightened me! You *swore* at me, papa! you actually did—and I was only coming to ask, . . .’ she hesitated, and then with a brave effort dashed straight into the question she was longing and fearing to put, ‘whether anything had happened to — to — anybody else besides Mutter?’

‘Happened? how do you mean?’ asked her father. ‘They lowered Gray to search, but he could not find a trace,’ he added, gravely.

‘Lowered him? Do you mean that they let him down the cliff by a rope?’ asked Nell, anxiously.

‘They pulled him up again safely!’ he answered with a faint smile, adding in a slow, apologetic manner, ‘I would have

hindered them—of course there was risk, but they would not listen to me. They said I was not fittest. He would go.’

‘*You*, papa, *you* offered to go!’ exclaimed Nell, in horror. Then suddenly twining her arms round his neck, she hid her head on his shoulder, murmuring, ‘And he went instead of you, he knew I could not spare you!’

Mr. Eveleigh did not speak immediately. He stroked her cheek and looked down at her with a strange, wistful expression.

‘Nell!’ at last he said, in a low impressive voice, ‘do you think Angus Gray would come between me and danger simply for your sake?’

Something in his tone, in the anxiety of the question, brought back again to Nell the vague sense of impending evil that had haunted her all the morning, and banished from her answer all trace of self-conscious

embarrassment. She raised herself and looked in her father's face, striving to read there the meaning of his question. Then she said, simply,

‘He knows how much you are to me, father dear, and he has seemed to prize my friendship.’

‘Friendship!’ repeated Mr Eveleigh, with an odd little laugh. ‘Ah! yes, I remember, Nell, you told me you were capable of friendship for a son of the people. It seems long ago, my Nell, the time when we disputed as to their merits!’

‘You never disputed Angus Gray’s trustworthiness, papa,’ said Nell, with a sudden reversion to her old spirit of championship.

‘Or his honour, eh, Nell? has a man of his class any notion of honour, I wonder?’ this Mr. Eveleigh asked with a sneer, but there was a wistfulness in his eyes as he waited for her answer, which came with her

usual impetuosity, while the blood rushed back hotly to her cheeks ;

‘If it is honourable to be true as steel, and to put other people’s good and happiness before his own, then I should say Angus Gray had a finer notion of honour than most of the fine gentlemen you have so often described to me, papa !’

‘Well, well, well ! don’t be so vehement. I daresay you know the spirit of this hero better than I do. But supposing . . let me put a case to you . . . it feels like old times doesn’t it, Nell, to be having one of our little quarrels ?’ said her father, interrupting himself to smile at her with a mournful attempt at playfulness, which caused Nell another involuntary pang of dismay, and which vanished very quickly . . . ‘supposing other people’s good and happiness, as you express it, was incompatible with his notion of his duty. . . . what he would call his *duty*, what

perhaps I should call my *honour* . . how then ?'

Nell did not immediately answer. She sat looking seriously into the fire considering. At last she said :

'I suppose I ought not to have any doubt. But I have. It might be a nobler thing to sacrifice a personal feeling of duty or honour, to put yourself in the wrong as it were, if by so doing you brought peace and happiness to others, than to hold rigidly and selfishly to the course of action that would ease your own conscience, and bring trouble and sorrow on other people.'

Mr. Eveleigh smiled a more natural smile as he listened to her.

'That is *your* point of view, Nell; I asked for Angus Gray's,' he said, quietly.

'Well, I was trying to put myself in his place. But I cannot. He has very decided notions of right and wrong. He holds by

truth, and does not think that “in saying it art is wanted,” but is strongly of opinion that “the honest man cannot omit to speak it!”’

Nell looked at her father with the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes as she quoted the old Spaniard’s maxim, but he did not respond to her playful allusion to his own views of the uses of truth. A heavy cloud came over his face.

‘Ah! he holds strongly by the truth. He would speak the truth if it should hang his dearest friend, would he! I told you his notions of honour could not be trusted to!’

The bitterness with which her father spoke, and his anxiety as to the possible conduct of Angus Gray, coupled with her remembrance of his look of horror as he had uttered Gray’s name in his sleep, gave Nell grave alarm. She was silent a moment, and the colour went again slowly out of her face as she nerved herself to speak. Then she

laid her hand on her father's, and without looking at him said softly,

‘ Let me answer your first question, father darling. Would Angus Gray come between you and danger for *my* sake? Yes, I don't *think* it; I am *sure*!’

And, still without looking at him, she got up quickly and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AFTER-THOUGHTS.

WHEN Nell had left him the same horrible feeling of shame came over him as had assailed him the night before, when he crept quietly into his own home through the window like a thief. He must have strangely lost control over his words and expressions so to betray to Nell his fear of Angus Gray. For there could be no doubt that she had divined that fear. Her manner, her tone, her paleness, had all conveyed to him the impression that she was compassionating an unknown but possible anguish. He tried to think what he had said, and he could not remember. The only words he could think

of, and that seemed to din themselves into his ears to the exclusion of all others, were those he had just heard, and that contained Nell's assurance of safety. 'I do not *think* it; I am *sure*!' Why was she so sure? Could it be that Ralph Curgenwen had been right, after all? The doubt of Nell, or rather his former *fear* that it was more than friendship that she unconsciously felt for Gray that had helped to rouse the devil of passion that had worked such disaster, returned upon him with full force now, bringing with it no additional suffering, but a strange sense of relief. Till this moment the cause of his anger, the warnings of Ralph Curgenwen had all been forgotten in his own misery. He had walked by Angus Gray with no more recollection of his special grievance against him (on their way to that hopeless search) than if it had never existed. Even when Gray had pointedly asked him if he had mistaken

Mutter for himself, the only feeling the question had conveyed to his mind was that Gray guessed that there had been a quarrel, and that part of the truth was being kept back. His mind had then been absorbed by the facts, and had lost sight of the causes : now it reverted to them. Gray's question had implied a knowledge of some possible *cause* for anger in Mr. Eveleigh's mind against him. And this, again, *might* imply a consciousness that it was deserved. On the other hand, it might only be that he was aware of the gossip, as how could he help being aware of it, that Ralph Curgenwen had made such mischief by repeating, and was therefore able to understand that Mr. Eveleigh might have been violently angered against him by having been informed of it. For the more he thought of it and of the man, the more sure Mr. Eveleigh became that Gray had nothing to reproach himself with either as regarded

Nell or himself. However little he might share Nell's foolish enthusiasm, he had seen enough of the man to know that he was neither a sneak nor a cad ; and now when he remembered in cold blood Ralph Curgenwen's suggestion that Gray should be horse-whipped, a flush of shame that he had allowed his passion to entertain the suggestion for a moment, deepened to one of the gravest self-contempt when he remembered how he had been carried away by his rage to strike poor Joe Mutter across the face almost at the bidding of a liar—for such he now made up his mind Ralph had been when he said that Angus Gray had allowed Nell's name to be coupled with his, and had boasted of her foolish preference. Justice was a quality Mr. Eveleigh prided himself on. As he sat solitary, his pride brought low by self-contempt, and his conscience burdened by Mutter's death, he made a valiant struggle

to regain his ordinary frame of mind, and to take a calmer and more philosophic view of the motives and actions of everybody concerned. But he had lost for the time being his self-confidence, his trust in his powers of self-control which he had begun to believe perfect in absence of all contradiction. His mind had not regained its balance, for he could not be just to Ralph Curgenwen, or hinder himself from looking upon him as the primary cause of all this trouble. He said to himself that it was Ralph who was the cad he had always considered him to be ; that to gratify an unmanly and ridiculous jealousy of Nell's liking and 'friendship' for Gray he had tried to blacken the man's character, and rouse such an ill feeling against him as should induce the continuance of the unequal friendship to be forbidden to Nell. Ralph wanted Nell for himself ; but *that* should never be with his consent, Mr. Eveleigh told himself

vehemently. Rather than that——. At this point Mr. Eveleigh stopped aghast. What! was he, of all people, so given over to unmanly fear for himself that he was actually allowing the thought to cross his mind that Nell might intuitively have judged rightly in thinking Gray a finer *gentleman* than Ralph Curgenwen? Was it possible that his intense indignation at the bare idea had passed away simply because he was *afraid* of Gray? And would it occur to Nell to guess that the thought of trading on the man's 'friendship' for her had been present to him when he asked her if Gray would come between him and danger for her sake? He had talked to her of his *honour* as of a thing of which Angus Gray could know nothing; and yet he was glad—yes, absolutely glad, that Ellinor Eveleigh, his daughter, should be so loved by Angus Gray the coast-guard, as to make it likely that if he guessed the truth with

regard to Mutter he would, for the sake of that love, shield her father from the consequences of his rash passion! Mr. Eveleigh, as he realised this, dropped his face in his hands and drank to the dregs the bitter cup of self-contempt. He was scarcely more just to himself than to Ralph Curgenwen. Nell was wrong in believing her father to have iron nerves, and it was as much a physical reaction from which he was suffering as grief of mind for having been the cause of the death of a man unknown to him, and yet dying by his fault; and it was in a measure a remorseful desire to atone to some one in some way that had wrought a change in his thoughts towards Gray. Exaggerating, as a man with a grain of heart in his position would naturally do, his own part in the disaster that had occurred, he believed his life to be now in Gray's power: and, just as naturally, he turned over in his own mind

with a vague comfort his reasons for trusting in the man. Following quickly on these thoughts came others which he vainly strove to drive away. How could he reward Gray, should their trust in him prove true? He had had influence once; could he help him to rise? Such things had been, and might be again. And then there darted through his mind the story of the laird's daughter, and his own half-contemptuous comment on it, that 'perhaps, after all, the man was a gentleman.' And when he had thought of this he clung eagerly to the idea, and laid it up carefully as a salve to any future injury to his pride that Gray might bring him. But even while his mind wandered away for moments into the unknown future, he would pull himself up and feel ashamed at these thoughts. Others then, less hopeful, would take their place. Supposing that Gray considered his honour, or, as he had said truly to Nell

Gray would call it, his *duty*, involved in revenging his 'best friend'—how then? Supposing even that love won the day over duty, and that he kept the truth in his own breast for Nell's sake, then nevertheless he might refuse help or reward of any sort from the man he believed to have been Mutter's murderer. Then, all his life long, he, Horace Eveleigh, would be under the deepest of obligations to Angus Gray! The morning wore itself away as he brooded over these things. He excused himself for his inaction by telling himself that he was waiting—waiting for tidings! Millar had promised to let him know if in the daylight anything more was discovered—if happily this mysterious business should be cleared up by the reappearance of Mutter. For the fruitlessness of the search had conveyed to Millar's mind, and also to the minds of one or two of the men, a hope that Mr. Eveleigh had been

mistaken, and that Mutter had simply been unavoidably detained for the night at Culve by illness or accident.

It was towards the evening before Millar came to the cottage, and the news he brought was no news to the miserable man who waited to hear it. Nell came eagerly to listen as he told how two of the men had gone over to Culve early in the day, and had made every possible enquiry, but could hear nothing of Mutter. Nobody had seen him; he had never been near the coast-guard station at Culve. He had not reappeared at Liaston; 'And so, sir, I'm afeard as how after all it *was* our Joe, poor fellow, as you heard give that cry. And all as I can think of to explain our finding nothing is that he must have fell sheer over at that bad place as goes straight to the sea, and, being high tide, got washed away out to sea at the turn. That's what me and some o' my men thinks, sir, for

I'm bound to say we're not agreed upon it, that the man you saw was our Joe!'

Millar was turning away to hide his own trouble when he remembered Mr. Eveleigh's. Coming back he said heartily :

'We're all on us grateful to *you*, sir, for what you did for him, or leastways would have done for him if it had so pleased the Almighty.' And, stretching out his rough hand, he gave Mr. Eveleigh's delicate white one a hard squeeze, and perhaps the tears that for a moment stood in his honest eyes prevented him from noticing the tearless misery in the face of the man he was thanking so fervently for what he had done for Joe Mutter. But Nell saw it, and wondered and feared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

THE people of Liaston had plenty of food for talk at this time. An event had actually occurred within two miles of their own town in which the unapproachable Mr. Eveleigh had played a 'heroic' part; and a man living in the town, if not actually belonging to it, had mysteriously disappeared. To add to this it was said that Mr. Curgenwen of Tremore was ill, the foundation for this report being simply the fact that no one had seen him since these events had happened. Not a single person in the town had a clear notion of what had really occurred. The coast-guards, who were the sources of information, differed consider-

ably in their accounts of it. All of them, concerned and anxious about Joe Mutter, took different ways of expressing that anxiety; some unhesitatingly affirming that if any man fell over the cliff it was not Joe; others, taking Millar's view that the body had been washed out to sea, and impressed by Mr. Eveleigh's conviction that it was 'one of them,' admitted that they believed it *might* be Joe. All of them agreed in praising the conduct and humanity of Mr. Eveleigh, while at the same time some spoke of him as 'a dreaming sort of chap,' who would be not unlikely in the confusion of the storm to imagine he heard a cry when there was no cry. One or two, in a morosely jocose way, reminded their listeners that Curgenwen of Tremore gave uncommonly good dinners, and that it was after dining at Tremore that Mr. Eveleigh's imagination had taken such a flight. But this view was held by few. The people of

the town at first inclined to Millar's opinion as being the most interesting, and were loud in their laudations of Mr. Eveleigh's pluck in having insisted upon being lowered, at the most dangerous point, to search for the body. For in the medley of reports Gray's part had been given to Mr. Eveleigh, and some of the latter's lady admirers began to air a suggestion of presenting him with some testimonial of respect ; but, happily for their reputation for common sense, the Liaston gentlemen contemptuously crushed this notion in the bud.

But when a day or two had gone by, and when after several ebbs and flows nothing whatever, not even a cap or a necktie, had been washed ashore to the men who at every low tide searched the coast within three or four miles of Liaston for a sign of their friend, the incredulity of those of them who from the first had refused to believe that Joe Mutter had come to such grief gained ground

amongst the rest, and spread about the town. The man's disappearance remained a fact, but the manner of it now began to be questioned. To do George Ivie justice, it was at first no fault of his that his hasty and ill-tempered speech on the night of the search when his mate had reproved him for 'an ill-tempered, suspicious beast,' on being requested to mark George's words that 'they wouldn't get him to believe that if it was Joe there was not something uglier than his mug in it' had got about. The very man who reproved him, and, in honest disgust at him for making it, had repeated it to one of the other men, who had repeated it again, and so on, and so on till its authorship was lost, while its meaning and significance were launched on the little world of Liaston first as a whisper, then as an actual suspicion of foul play, but one which from its very vagueness seemed unlikely ever to be taken up seriously. It

became a delightful addition to the ordinary topics of conversation at the club and at the tea-parties. People took sides, and disputed about it with a good deal of enjoyment. Some of the ladies, pleased with the idea of mystery, took the suspicious view. Most of the men, averse to mystery, thought 'Old Eveleigh,' as the coast-guards most absurdly insisted on calling him, was a man not likely to be mistaken, or to give himself all the trouble he had taken for nothing. But some of them who possessed sailing-boats, and so were constantly down by the pier, were personally acquainted with the coast-guards, and Joe Mutter had been well known to them, and a good deal liked by them for his frank merry ways and obligingness. Having nothing to do, it became an object to these gentlemen to take a saunter down to the station to enquire whether anything had been discovered, and on such occasions they got into

conversation with one or another of the men, and were rather apt to make capital of these various conversations for the benefit of their friends at the club, who laughed at them for their credulousness when they let it plainly be seen that they, like the ladies, had been influenced by the suspicion of mystery.

For a day or two Joe Mutter's disappearance had the happy effect of causing poor Nell's supposed delinquencies to be forgotten. But the question of them revived in full force when it came out that there had been some sort of a quarrel, or at least a marked coolness between Angus Gray and the lost Joe. 'Ah—in-deed! Was that so?' And the old maids and old bachelors drew their chairs together and groaned. It was to be feared—*much* to be feared, that a woman was at the bottom of a quarrel between two such men as these. And what other woman was it likely a man like Gray would be interested in

when the daughter of the proud Mr. Eveleigh had elected to honour him with her regard. 'Ah, indeed! and so there was a quarrel *about her!*' was naturally the next remark. 'And there is *no end* to a quarrel about a woman!' was the next, spoken significantly and suspiciously with many a shake of the mean old heads, and many a fear of the slandering tongues that the poor man would never be heard of again *now!* It is fair to the humanity of Liaston to say that these wretched croakers were a small minority—the same minority that had been so ready to suspect evil of Nell—and that they were mercilessly abused for their uncharitableness. But no railing against them has any power to stop the tongues of those who love an evil report, and any slander once put into words is safe to find some believers, and the *common people*, taking a wide application of the expression, invariably receive it gladly. No

man or woman of sense, and there were, of course, plenty of such in the town, had a shadow of doubt of Gray, but in some parts of the town the women whispered and the men looked shyly at him as he went by. The two or three police of Liaston had made enquiry to the best of their ability, and, having no personal animus against Gray, on the contrary, sharing in the general respect for him, they gladly came to the only possible conclusion that he had had nothing to do with Joe's disappearance. They could not even find that the much talked-of 'quarrel' between them had been a quarrel at all. Joe had not gone so often to the Grays' house in the evenings as usual of late; he and Angus had been less together, and Joe had occasionally let a sneer at his friend's 'pride' escape him. This was about all the reporters of the 'quarrel' had really to go upon. Mr. Eveleigh stuck to his first story, and was

not to be shaken in his belief that the man, the coast-guard, he had seen and heard that night was Joe Mutter, and had fallen over the cliff, though the public were not aware of it ; and Angus Gray's story of his exchange with Mutter of that night's guard received confirmation, and it seemed to the police satisfactory confirmation, from a girl in Lias-ton whom Joe had been ' courting ; ' the very girl the grocer's wife had warned against Joe's flitting fancies. This girl, by name Dorothy Challice, voluntarily supported Gray's statement, saying that Joe had told her of the arrangement, which she believed to have something to do with the coast-guard duty, as Joe had been very mysterious about it, and had said that it was ' a bit o' business he'd had his eye on for some days, but he had said nothin' to nobody till he could make sure,' and she was never to mention it, ' which neither she never had, till, seein' as some

folks seemed to think as Mr. Gray had had somethin' to say to it, which sure she was would be the last wish of Joe Mutter that such should be said, wherever he might be; he was that fond of Mr. Gray.' And poor Dorothy had not been able to keep back her tears before the sympathising policeman to whom she felt bound to confide this, having been told that the police were making enquiries, who promised her that unless it was necessary nobody should know that she knew anything about Joe's private affairs. And he kept his word, holding that it was no business of the public's if the police were satisfied that there was no evidence against any person or persons unknown to justify an accusation of foul play. Nothing was done, because the police were unanimously of opinion that there was nothing to do. They were understood to be making enquiries, and this quite satisfied the minds of the sensible people, who, as

we have said, were a majority in the town. But it was too good an opportunity for the editor of the local paper to let pass ; and the paragraph headed 'Mysterious disappearance,' that appeared in that week's number, was sensational in the highest degree, delightfully suspicious, but most carefully vague in its allusions, and well calculated to support the minority of scandal-mongers in their doubts and *fears*—which were hopes—that there was something very far wrong in this business, which would some day be brought to light.

Amongst the people whom it affected was George Ivie, the coast-guard. From the very offence which his own ill-natured speech had occasioned there grew up in him a sullen pride in sticking to it. 'He wasn't a-going to be talked out o' it that the whole business was d—d queer—not he!' he reiterated again and again, and more openly after the

paragraph in the newspaper came out. And when twitted with his jealousy of Gray upon one occasion before all the other men, he got into a passion and declared that they might think what they chose, but 'maybe they would find the "pride o' the station" the shame of it some day, and *where* was he that night Joe was lost? Would they tell him that? Nobody had never come to the bottom o' that, and never would, he was afeared.' A howl of indignation saluted his speech, and raised in the man's breast a stronger ill-feeling against the other, whom his mates so far preferred before him. Long after the 'mysterious disappearance' had ceased to engross the talk of the town it continued to be the talk of the station, and it was at George Ivie's suggestion that it was observed that Gray never by any chance uttered a syllable on the subject. It was George Ivie who pointed out to his mates

that, whatever might be the cause, since that fatal night Angus Gray was a changed man, moody, silent, haggard, given to long absences, when nobody knew where he was or what he was doing ; going out to sea alone on the wildest days that a boat could possibly live, and when the pretence of fishing was too absurd to take in anybody but a fool. And the continual dropping of Ivie's cruel hints, for which, nevertheless, he had the excuse that he believed them to be gently expressed truths, combined with the actual change that had come over Angus, produced in time the natural effect. 'There's a somethin' on his mind for sure,' they admitted at last, and wondered and doubted, till gradually and almost imperceptibly they changed to him. First the heartiness went out of their greetings ; then the greetings became shorter and fewer. They would stop their talk if he came near, and grow con-

strained and unnatural ; they would pretend not to see him if he went by, to avoid speaking to him. Even Millar, sharp and observant, noticed the change in Angus with suspicion, and, while unable to find any fault, would speak to him more roughly and with less respect than he had used to do. The sailors about the quays, the fishermen, the people in the town who still retained an interest in the matter, all fell into this same suspicion of him which, but for his own changed manner and appearance, they would never for a moment have entertained ; and it was not long before John Davidson was the only man left who now thoroughly believed in the former ' pride o' the station.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A LOCAL MAGISTRATE.

RUMOUR had said amongst other things that Curgenwen of Tremore was ill, and for once in a way rumour was right. While Mr. Eveleigh had, or considered he had, been the cause of Joe Mutter's death, and Angus Gray, who believed that the father of the woman he loved so deeply had, whether intentionally or not, murdered his best friend, bore each the burden of his secret and made no sign, but as the days passed hid it as best they might when others were by, Ralph Curgenwen, who had allowed the deadly struggle to take place in his presence, hoping and watching to see both the men killed, was

hiding his face in the pillows and tossing about in his bed in a restless fever of remorse and of a fruitless repentance. He was really ill, but he made himself out to be worse than he was to avoid the necessity of going to Liaston and having to listen to the comments and reply to the suggestions of his friends in the town. Inclined by nature to attacks of cold and fever, the exposure of that night in the storm, added to the extreme agitation of mind he had gone through, brought him down so low for some days as to cause his beautiful sister both surprise and anxiety. Never before had she known him so thoroughly unmannered and nervous about himself. Never before had he been so difficult to please, so fractious, or so bad-tempered. Ava could not herself see that he was so very ill.

‘Indeed, dear Ralph, I feel sure you have nothing but a bilious cold,’ she said, in answer

to his assertions that he had never felt so ill in his life before.

‘A bilious cold!’ repeated Ralph scornfully, looking up in her serene, calm face with the first angry feeling he had felt towards her since she came between him and his inheritance; ‘a bilious cold! I doubt, if the world were coming to an end to-morrow, if it would even bring a shade of regret over your delightful calm!’ he added sneeringly.

Ava coloured deeply. Lately she had begun to fear she was not as placid or as contented as she looked; and, as far as Ralph was concerned, her conscience acquitted her of want of interest. Eminently reasonable always, she remembered now that he was ill, or that he thought he was ill, and only replied to his sneer by saying gently but firmly:

‘Then, Ralph dear, if you feel so very ill, I shall send at once for the doctor,’ and

was turning away to put her words into practice when he stopped her roughly.

‘You will do no such thing. Send for the doctor! Just like you, Ava, always jumping to conclusions, and doing things in such a hurry, and exciting yourself about nothing!’ he said angrily, with eminent contradictoriness; ‘who wants the doctor unless one has the small-pox, or the cholera, or that kind of thing? Can’t a fellow be allowed to feel awfully ill without being told he is going to die, and must have the doctor! You’ll do no such thing as send for him. There’s nothing the matter with me, but I’ve got some kind of a chill; that’s all.’ And he turned his head away from Ava as he spoke.

She smiled to herself, and good-naturedly patted his hand as it lay close to her on the bed, and when he looked at her again she laughed softly.

‘There’s nothing to laugh at,’ said Ralph

solemnly, but not crossly this time ; and something in his face quickly quenched Ava's mirth. She laid her cool hand on his forehead, and smoothed back his thick black hair tenderly, as a new idea struck her.

' You would tell me if you were in trouble, Ralph ? ' she said kindly.

' Trouble ! what do you mean ? Trouble ! Didn't you say it was a bilious cold yourself ! Do go away, there's a good girl, and let me have some peace ! ' he added, pettishly.

But Ava had only got to the door, when he called her back, the old familiar brotherly love getting the better of his trouble for the moment ; and with the graciousness that won him so many friends, he held out his hand to her.

' How *can* a fellow be good-tempered with a *bilious* cold ? ' he said, smiling his own cheerful smile. Ava bent down and kissed him affectionately.

‘ You dear Ralph ! you may surely be cross for once in your life if you like ! ’ she said, and went away relieved, hoping he was not very ill or in any very serious trouble. She was accustomed to his taking care of himself and knew he was nervous about his chest and throat, but she had never known him take to his bed for two or three days at a stretch like this, and she determined, if he did not feel better very speedily that she would send for the doctor whether he liked it or not. But her threat of doing so had effectually roused Ralph. To face the doctor’s questions would be as bad as to face the gossip of Liaston, and he could not trust himself yet to do either. Ava had not long left him before he got up and dressed himself and followed her to her sitting-room, and allowed her to persuade him to lie down on the sofa and be wrapped up, and made comfortable with pillows. In his solitary hours, since

that fatal night, he had thought of his own part in the catastrophe, with a genuine horror at first. Then he had gone over eagerly every possible extenuating circumstance, and he had tasked his mind to make excuses for himself not unsuccessfully. He said to himself that Mr. Eveleigh had raised the devil in him by what he had said about the possible loss of Tremore, by refusing to believe what he was told about Gray, and by taunting him with listening to low gossip. And then it must be remembered that Ralph believed all he had heard of Gray, or had at least persuaded himself that he believed it. He tried to think that he had been beside himself with passion when he had watched the two men, and had not been answerable for his conduct. The meanness of it he was of course wholly unable to understand, otherwise he could never have been in the position of a secret and passive witness to a crime.

that a little courage would have prevented. He was therefore saved from the disgust that an equally cowardly but more sensitive man would have felt at having to apply to himself the minor epithets of sneak and spy. The broad view only troubled him, that if anything came of it, if by any possibility it could be proved that he had been crouching by the rock, he would be thought to have been an accessory to the murder. For murder he believed it to have been, intentional for the moment, but bitterly repented of the next ; for in his ears still rang the loud despair of Mr. Eveleigh's voice, as he called Gray's name.

‘Gray! For God’s sake answer, Angus Gray!’

It was not Gray’s death that Ralph could bring himself to regret, but the manner of it! He shuddered when he remembered his horrible hope that both men would roll over

the cliff, and quite honestly thanked a kind Providence that had saved him from the consequences and remorse of his own evil thought. The turn of his mind led him to accept without much difficulty the excuses he made for himself; and it also led him to take great comfort from the fact that he had at first refrained from warning Mr. Eveleigh of his presence for fear of startling him, and so bringing about the very catastrophe that he would not now acknowledge to himself he hoped for, till Angus Gray appeared on the scene. *Then* he could not but admit to himself that a devil had seized him, and he was truly remorseful and repentant, but still inclined to think that as he had *done* nothing either for or against either man, he was not so fearfully culpable after all. Once having admitted this view, his sanguine temperament eagerly seized upon it, enlarged upon it, and finally almost believed it. Two or three

days of brooding over it had brought him to this, and to a sort of accustomedness to the horror that was gradually lessening it, when Ava proposed to send for the doctor. This, as has been said, roused him up. And once parted by an effort from his solitary thoughts, his next state of mind became an anxious desire to avoid getting back to them. He sat up so late that night that at last Ava had to remonstrate ; but he had effected his object of tiring himself out so completely, that sleep would come naturally to him. He slept, for the first time, soundly and well, and in the morning he felt his courage return and his hopefulness also. After all, what had he *done* ? Nothing ! absolutely nothing, but watch a quarrel in which it would have been madness to interfere ! What could have happened but a probable *accident* to all three if he had rushed between two men so violently angry as were Mr. Eveleigh and

Angus. Gray? Ralph Curgenwen, as he looked in the glass at his pale handsome dark face, thought he was sufficiently like an invalid to be able to keep up the fiction till he felt able to face Liaston and the questioning faces at the club. But he also thought that life was not ended for him yet, because Angus Gray had met with *an accident*; and his blood accordingly began to course again more healthfully through his veins, and his eyes to lose their look of dull horror and apathy. The *bilious cold* was passing as Ralph sat in Ava's sitting room, and had a message brought to him that old Farley would like to see him if he was able.

At first he said 'No,' then he hurriedly changed his mind and said 'Yes.'

A deep red flush spread all over his face as he rose languidly to receive his old friend. Ava looked at him kindly, and was sorry to see him so much pulled down by his cold as

to flush in that way at such a common thing as old Farley's appearance.

'Well, John!' said Ralph, holding out his hand, 'what's the news?'

'The news as most concerned me was the news as Bess heard in the town as how you was ill, Master Ralph!' said John, keeping hold of Ralph's hand, and peering anxiously into his face; 'and you ain't not to say just as hearty as usual, I can see that!' he added, affectionately.

Ralph disengaged his hand, and sat down in his chair again, and passed his hand quickly over his eyes.

'My brother is nearly well again, John,' said Ava in her cold clear voice. 'Sit down and tell him the news,' she added, loftily. For herself, she had the supremest disdain of the news of Liaston, and expected to feel no interest in their conversation. But when old Farley sat down as he was bid, and without

any circumlocution poured forth the curious and conflicting story of Mutter's disappearance, and gave the common version of Mr. Eveleigh's share in it, she felt roused to both interest and excitement.

'So noble of him! Just what I should have expected!' she muttered to herself.

'*Mutter's* disappearance!' repeated Ralph, sitting up and looking at Farley with wide distended eyes. 'Did you say *Mutter*?'

'Aye, Joe Mutter! You'll mind him, I'm thinkin', Master Ralph—a cheerful, laughin' sort o' chap. They could better ha' spared a better man down at the station, I'm thinkin',' said old Farley grimly, 'and there's them as *will* have it he never was near the cliff, and old Eveleigh was dreamin' when he heard a cry!' he added.

'What do they think then?' questioned Ralph eagerly.

'They doesn't know what to think, not

one on 'em,' said Farley, shutting his mouth resolutely, with a curious expression in his face.

Ralph sank back in his chair again, and heaved a sigh of the deepest and most intense relief. Not Angus Gray! only Joe Mutter! And not a sign of him was to be found! In spite of what his own eyes had seen, and what his own ears had heard, Ralph was that moment persuaded that by some means the lost man had escaped death. *He* knew, if no other man knew, the spot where Mutter fell. What a fool he had been to make himself so miserable about nothing! While Ava, concerned chiefly about Mr. Eveleigh, questioned old Farley, Ralph sat silent, pondering. Presently he said, looking steadily at Farley,

'Eveleigh's story was simply that he saw a man and heard a cry, and then the man disappeared, I think you said?'

'Just so—a queer story!' answered John.

‘I see nothing queer in it at all!’ said Ralph, hastily, ‘if there had been anything queer, as you call it, do you suppose Eveleigh would have gone straight to the station and told it himself?’

‘I’m supposin’ nothing about it, Master Ralph. I say it’s queer, and I sticks to that,’ returned Farley, resolutely.

‘Why, you old idiot! what possible motive for flinging Joe Mutter over the cliff could Mr. Eveleigh have?’ asked Ralph, excitedly.

‘Ralph!’ exclaimed Ava, reproachfully, ‘how can you suggest anything so palpably absurd!’

Farley rose up to go with a look of slight offence, and as he stood with his hat in his hand, he looked at Ralph with the same odd expression in his face as had come over it once before, since he came in. Then he said grimly,

‘I never was reckoned much of a fool, Master Ralph, thank ye for the compliment, which, seeing as you’re not just yourself, I’ll look over. I never supposed *Mr. Eveleigh* could have any motive for flinging any man over the cliff. All as I say is, it’s a queer story, and that I sticks to ;’ and he was turning away, when Ralph said hastily,

‘Come now, John, you ought to know better than to take offence at anything *I* say. I wish you would sit down and tell me honestly what you *do* think.’

‘Master Ralph,’ said John gravely, ‘I’m not a-going to commit myself, and what’s more, I haven’t made up my mind what I thinks. All as I am sure of is, that if so be as it had been Mr. Eveleigh as disappeared ’stead o’ Joe Mutter, somebody would ha’ took up the business seriously by this time. You’re a magistrate yourself, Master Ralph !’ And Farley gave his stick an emphatic

knock on the floor, and looked expectantly at Ralph.

‘A magistrate!’ repeated Ralph, colouring up angrily, ‘Lord help us, man! you didn’t come to tell *me* to take it up? What can *I* do? I won’t meddle in other people’s business, magistrate or no magistrate! Really, John Farley, I gave you credit for more sense! Because *you* choose to think a straightforward story “queer,” I’m to make a stir in the matter! Why, man! I couldn’t if I would, and I wouldn’t if I could!’ and Ralph got up, and began to walk up and down the room in a state of great agitation.

‘Well, well!’ said Farley, soothingly, ‘I might ha’ waited till you was about again. But if so be as it’s true as you *couldn’t* make a stir, then there’s one law for the rich and another for the poor, in this misgoverned land!’

‘Look here, Farley!’ said Ralph, coming

suddenly to a halt in front of him, 'you're talking nonsense. I can do nothing, or could do nothing if it *was* Eveleigh, unless indeed . . . ' and Ralph turned very white, but kept his eyes steadily on Farley's face ; '*you* or others are prepared to charge some person of having caused the death of this man, and are prepared to give evidence to support your charge !'

'Me charge a man as never did me an ill turn wi' murder !' exclaimed Farley, indignantly. 'You might ha' knowed better nor that, Master Ralph ! All as I want is a fair enquiry after Joe, nought more ! Charge an innocent man wi' murder, indeed !' And the colour deepened in old Farley's ruddy cheeks to an angry purple.

'If you don't take care, that's what people will think you mean to do when you say the story is a "queer one" !' said Ralph, recovering himself a little.

‘Tis just the contrary of that I’m wantin’, Master Ralph,’ said Farley, thoughtfully; ‘when Bess came home primed up wi’ a pack o’ lies about quarrels and what not, as had took place atween Joe Mutter and Angus Gray, I thinks to myself as I’ll come to you and see about an enquiry to stop their lyin’ tongues, Master Ralph! but if so be as it’s out o’ your power—Well, Angus Gray has a broad back of his own, and a good courage . . .’

‘What’s that, John? What has a quarrel between Mutter and Gray to do with Mutter’s disappearance?’ asked Ralph in surprise. ‘You don’t mean there’s a suspicion of Gray?’ and as he asked the question, an odd flash of satisfaction gleamed for a moment in Ralph’s black eyes.

Farley saw it, and it displeased him. With the candour he was accustomed to use to the

‘boy’ he considered he had educated, he said severely,

‘If I was you, Master Ralph, I wouldn’t let my jealousy of a man make me so ready to have an ill thought of him!’

Ralph coloured violently, and without a word turned sharp round, went to the window, and stared out at the beds of Ava’s garden with a mist of anger and shame in his eyes.

‘What *can* you mean, John?’ asked Ava, opening her surprised innocent eyes; ‘how can *my* brother be jealous of a man like Gray?’

Now it was Ava’s turn to excite Farley’s wrath. He looked down at her and chuckled grimly :

‘It do seem queer, don’t it, Miss Ava, as a *gentleman*, like *your* brother, should be jealous of a coast-guard. The world’s turning upside down, seems to you, don’t it? There’s Miss Nell, now, she don’t set no more store by a gentleman nor by a man like

me, Miss Ava! Seems mortal queer to you, don't it?' he asked, sneeringly.

But his broad satire was lost upon Ava. She only felt he was rude, and determined to punish him, so she said calmly:

'Yes, John, it does seem very strange to me. Miss Eveleigh has some very odd opinions, but she is young and will grow out of them when she gets more sense, and is away from foolish influences!'

'Meanin' mine, eh? Well, well, Miss Nell's not the girl as I takes her for if she gives in to my influence, or your influence, or——'

'Angus Gray's influence, perhaps?' suggested Ralph with a growl, without turning round

'*Or* Angus Gray's influence,' repeated old Farley, gravely. 'Good-day to you, Miss Ava. Good-day to you, Master Ralph!' And Farley, in a very different temper to

that in which he had entered the room, took his departure without further ceremony.

‘How you can endure him, Ralph!’ exclaimed Ava the moment the door closed on him. ‘Sometimes I quite hate him, the old bear! And what *does* he mean?’ she added curiously.

But Ralph was not inclined to enlighten her. A little mollified by the gravity with which old Farley had repelled the charge of Angus Gray’s influence on Nell, Ralph only said :

‘Oh, nothing! you know John’s way. There is nothing he likes so much as having a slap at your aristocratic prejudices—which I must say, Ava, are too ridiculously displayed at times!’ he continued, turning adroitly upon Ava’s weak point.

‘My dear Ralph!’ she exclaimed, anxious to defend herself, ‘surely you would not like

me to hold Nell Eveleigh's absurd views of the people ?

‘No, and I fancy her notions don't please her father as much . . . as yours do, eh, Ava ?’ and Ralph, who had recovered his temper, smiled at her kindly.

She looked up at him shyly with her sweet wondering eyes, and meeting his laughing ones she cast down her own while a soft blush like a young girl's spread itself over her lovely face.

‘I declare, Ava, you are a most fearful imposture!’ exclaimed Ralph, ‘at this moment you look about sixteen!’ he added with perfect honesty. And then he sank back in his chair again, and set his mind to work on the changes her marriage with Mr. Eveleigh might bring for a while, till the other thoughts that Farley's visit had suggested drove the less important subject of Ava's happiness far from his meditations. All

compunction at his own share in this mystery had vanished in intensest relief when the conviction of Mutter's escape entered his mind. As long as the man remained lost and the mystery was unsolved, Ralph felt his own knowledge to be no longer a remorse, but a power. Mr. Eveleigh's story had shown him to be afraid of consequences ; and how to turn that fear to his own advantage was now Ralph Curgenwen's chiefest concern.

CHAPTER XL.

FARLEY'S ADVICE.

FARLEY had arrived at the knowledge of Ralph's jealousy by a very simple process. Like everybody else he had become aware of the intimacy that had so quickly sprung up between the cottage and Tremore. He had taken the liberty of alluding to it to Ralph, who, being in earnest and not being troubled with much sensitiveness, had not only not resented all that Farley implied by his little jokes on the subject, but had encouraged them by laughing at him, and constantly turning his chance conversations with his old friend to the subject of Nell's perfections, on which Farley was always delighted to discourse. It may easily be supposed that

Farley's old affection for Ralph, and his new affection for Nell made him look forward with extreme satisfaction to the probable conclusion of Ralph's 'courting,' as he plainly and broadly called his various attentions to the Eveleighs. Like the Liaston people he did not suppose any girl in her senses would object to change her life at the cottage for Ralph Curgenwen and Tremore. And as he gave Nell credit for more sense than most girls, he considered her all the more likely to take an unromantic and wise view of the advantages Ralph had to offer her. Not only had he discoursed to Ralph perpetually about Nell's goodness, but he had also more than once chuckled with extreme enjoyment over her radical crazes, and laughed at the notion of Ralph's eventually coming round completely to share his own opinions through her influence. And on each occasion he had observed that Ralph did not take these allu-

sions at all in good part, going so far as to run the risk of offending Farley by his denunciations of the folly of women holding any opinions at all, and more particularly the extremely foolish ones that Miss Eveleigh professed to hold with respect to the people ; 'calling a man like Gray, the coast-guard, her "friend" for instance !' said Ralph sneeringly, upon one of these occasions.

'She might find a many less fit for a friend to the like of her, might Miss Nell,' Farley had replied, mindful of his impressions in his unpleasant interview with Gray. 'Angus Gray has ways as a gentleman might be proud to own,' he added with conviction.

'No doubt, no doubt ! Very superior for a common man !' replied Ralph grudgingly, remembering his first interview with the Eveleighs, and Mr. Eveleigh's snub to himself on the subject uneasily.

And by the expression of his face and

his grudging words Farley had guessed at his jealousy, and had refrained from taking offence at Ralph's manner of speaking of 'the people' in consideration of it. When the disappearance of Mutter, coupled with Mr. Eveleigh's account of it, had stirred up the mind of Liaston first to wonder, then to doubt, then to suspicions that they could bring forward no evidence to support, Farley was much exercised in his mind on the subject of Angus Gray's connection with the mystery. He had not forgotten that the man whom he himself had seen running quickly down the field path that led from his farm to the shore had appeared to him to run like Gray. But this he determined to keep to himself, certain of Gray's innocence, of whatever else he was in doubt. And it was the certainty of this, coupled with a desire to atone to Gray for having believed him capable of the boasts of

which he heard him accused that had sent Farley to Tremore to see what Ralph could do towards clearing up the matter, more than his anxiety as to the health of his well-beloved landlord. He had been disappointed at the result of his visit there, vexed with Ralph, vexed with Ava, and vexed with himself for letting out that he thought the vague suspicions of Liaston in any way pointed at Gray. As he trotted along on his old cob back to his farm, it occurred to him to wonder over the fact of his long affection for Ralph Curgenwen, not with any desire to cast him out of his heart, but with some new wonder that Ralph had ever achieved such a hold upon it. Looking back, he remembered many traits in Ralph that he did not like, but none, as far as he knew, that had vexed him as that look of satisfaction in Ralph's eyes when he asked if there were suspicions of Gray. Involuntarily Farley

contrasted the absence of all sign of jealousy or dislike in Gray's way of speaking of Mr. Curgenwen with Ralph's grudging remarks on Gray. The faces of the two men, each under trying circumstances, appeared to his mind's eyes ; and with a shudder he knew that it would be impossible to suspect Gray of crime or meanness, while there was that about Ralph which he felt he had not yet come to the bottom of. He felt like a father whose judgment condemns his son, but whose heart loves on in spite of reason. The only romance in John Farley's life was his affection for Ralph. It had conquered even his principles, and reduced his radicalism to mere words. When he remembered this it added bitterness to his present feelings ; and he was in a very uncomfortable state of mind when he arrived at the farm. The house door was open, and in the doorway stood Nell Eveleigh, her head thrown a little back,

and her lips pressed angrily together as if listening to what somebody was saying inside the house. The moment she saw Farley she came quickly down the garden path, and was beside him before he had had time to dismount. She laid her hand on the cob's neck, and patted him as if she were unconscious of the act, while she scanned her old friend's face with an angry gleam in her grey eyes.

'*You* don't believe it, John?' she asked, abruptly, without a word of greeting.

'Now what has that woman been a-sayin' of next?' exclaimed John, casting an indignant glance towards the house, and promising himself to 'give it' to Bess the moment he saw her.

'She says,' said Nell, speaking quietly with an evident effort, 'and she meant it in kindness to—to Angus Gray, so don't be angry with your sister, John, that it is "a shame that all Liaston, his own mates, and

even the newspapers should suspect a man like Gray of making away with his friend, Joe Mutter"! and Nell's eyes blazed with indignation, and a red spot of colour rose in her cheeks, but her voice was steady and there was a hard ring in it as she repeated Bess Farley's words.

'The devil's in the woman! begging your pardon, Miss Nell. I'll lay odds she's the first as has given tongue to the vile slander! Meant it in kindness, did ye say? She's allays a-making of mischief *for kindness!*' exclaimed Farley, in great vexation.

'Then it is not true that there is that suspicion?' asked Nell, fixing her eyes steadily on his face.

Farley turned his head aside for a moment uneasily; then he looked down anxiously into the girl's face, and laying his hard rough hand on hers as it rested on the horse's neck, he said gravely:

‘Miss Nell, they say as “murder will out”; so will innocence, I says. Don’t you be afeard for Gray! ’Tis nought but the talk of the folks as takes a pleasure in bringing down in the dust them as is o’er high above ’em. There’s not a sensible man or woman in the place as believes a word of it; no more wouldn’t I if I was you.’

‘I believe it!’ exclaimed Nell, and a smile for a moment softened her face; but it grew hard again directly, as she asked quietly, ‘Does Angus Gray know that . . . he is suspected?’

‘That I can’t answer for,’ responded Farley. ‘Them as is ill spoken o’ hears the news last, mostly. I wouldn’t take no notice, neither to himself nor to nobody if I was you, Miss Nell,’ he advised, with another anxious look at her.

‘I shall go and see his mother, and so

will my father,' she said, an obstinate look coming over her face.

'I wouldn't, no, I wouldn't, Miss Nell,' entreated Farley; 'twill harm yourself and do no good to the poor lad!' he added incautiously.

'Harm me!' repeated Nell, colouring all over. 'I don't understand in what way,' she continued haughtily, 'and it cannot but do good that people should see that my father and I have just the same feeling towards him we have always had.'

'Ah, Miss Nell, I allays knew you were one that wouldn't be guided; but I doubt ye're wrong—I doubt ye're wrong!' And Farley looked at her with disapproval, and his words had more reference to her last ones than to her determination to make a demonstration of the Eveleighs' respect for Gray. He 'doubted' that her feelings were 'just the same as they had always been' with

respect to this man whose misfortunes she was taking so much to heart as she was now doing, if he might judge by her face.

‘John, suppose Bess were to be lost, and people said you had “made away with her——”

‘Which I shouldn’t wonder but she’ll aggravate me into yet!’ interposed Farley, with a grim smile.

‘And I stayed away from the farm, and took no notice of you ; how would you like that ?’ asked Nell seriously.

‘Miss Nell, ’twould be *no ways the same at all*. There’s nobody as could mistake the sort o’ interest a young lady like you takes in a old man like me ! There, my dear, I’ve said it, seein’ as there’s nobody else as’ll take it upon theirselves to speak a word for your good ; and don’t take it amiss, Miss Nell ; don’t ye now, my dear !’ Farley’s face was as red as Nell’s when he had finished, and he

looked at her shyly and wistfully with his honest eyes full of the affectionate anxiety he felt for her. The anger his words roused in Nell died away as she met this kindly look. Yet she spoke coldly as she drew away the hand he had taken between his two hands in his earnestness, and with a proud calmness said :

‘Nor is it at all likely that people will mistake the sort of interest I take in Angus Gray! But even if it were to be so, what then? Thank you, John; I know you meant well: I am not angry. Good-bye.’ And with rather a stately bend of her pretty head, she turned away.

Farley looked after her, and shook his head gravely. Then he dismounted, and, after seeing himself to the comforts of his cob, was sufficiently restored to his usual good temper to trust himself to speak his mind to his sister without too much acrimony.

Bess, as usual, had meant no harm, and, as usual, settled their differences with tears and reproaches, which always, in spite of long custom, melted good old John, whose heart was a great deal softer than his speech and his manners.

As for Nell, her dignity was all outside show ; and whether she was most angry and indignant for Angus Gray's misfortunes, or at the possibility of her interest in them being mistaken, it would have been hard to say. She herself never for a moment doubted the nature of her interest. She knew that she respected Gray, liked him, thought him the only interesting human being except her father and old Farley that she had ever seen ; and she considered that she was justified by her own 'superiority' to the opinions of her own class in treating a man whose individual merit circumstances had brought under her notice according to her notions of his merits,

and not according to his social position. More than this she did not know, yet, as she walked home after her interview with Farley, a new sort of meaning came into her recollection of her last interview with Angus Gray on the night Joe Mutter was lost. His words, 'It's long since I've seen you,' spoken almost in spite of himself, implied more to her now than they had done then, and yet, strangely enough, they did not offend her more.

CHAPTER XLI.

A DEMONSTRATION.

NELL went straight to her father with the account Bess Farley had given of the suspicions that were rife in the town, fully expecting him to share in her indignation. The harassed look that had never left his face since the night he came home from Tremore, and which Nell had not been able to help noticing, deepened as he listened to her. But when she had done he only said, 'And what did John Farley say?'

'He spoke of it,' said Nell, 'as of a calumny that no sensible person would believe in.'

‘Then, my Nell, depend upon it no sensible person will believe in it,’ Mr. Eveleigh responded, heaving a long deep sigh of relief. And presently he added, ‘I would take no notice of it, Nell. After all, what is the man to us?’

‘Oh, papa! and I thought you would be sure to want to go down with me to Mrs. Gray’s, at the station, just to show that *we* could never doubt him. I mean Angus Gray,’ said Nell, showing both surprise and vexation.

‘I go down to the station and make a demonstration in favour of Gray!’ And Mr. Eveleigh laughed oddly. ‘My dear child,’ he added, ‘of course, if it were necessary, and would do any good . . . but a calumny runs its course and exhausts itself for want of strength in itself. The best way to stop it is to take no notice.’

‘But, father dear, Gray will think we

yours will scorch me with their lightning when that occasion comes ! Child, *why* have you set up such a will of your own ? ’

There was a pathetic appeal in his own eyes that touched Nell, but also made her inclined to laugh ; which at last she did. But she stuck to her point. Kneeling down beside him, she rested her elbows on his knees, and looking up at him beseechingly, she said, ‘ Come with me, father, darling. ’

‘ I couldn’t, Nell ; no, I couldn’t. There, don’t say any more, ’ he answered hastily.

‘ It would do you good to come out, ’ she persisted ; ‘ you have not been out for days, not since—— ’

‘ The night I dined at Tremore, ’ he interposed. ‘ Did you say I hadn’t been out at all ? ’ he asked, anxiously.

‘ Why, don’t you know you have not ? ’ said Nell, opening her eyes.

‘ No ; I—I—the fact is, Nell, that man’s

death was a shock to me, as I dare say you have observed,' he said firmly, but not looking at her.

'Yes, dear. Perhaps he isn't dead,' Nell suggested, on the spur of the moment, although the idea had never come to her before.

Her father turned his head away from her to hide the quiver of his lips. 'I told you I saw him fall, child,' he said presently.

'No; you said you heard him cry out,' corrected Nell.

'Yes, yes, that is what I meant,' he assented hastily. 'I think my brains are rather in a confused condition,' he added, apologetically.

'Then come out, and clear them,' entreated Nell.

'No, Nell, no; not to the coast-guards!' he answered, decidedly.

For a moment Nell said nothing. Then

she laid her head on his shoulder with a caressing movement. 'Father, dear,' she said, with a slight tremble in her voice, 'to please me, for my sake, come with me.'

Mr. Eveleigh quickly turned her face towards him, and looked anxiously into it. It was red, and there was a half-shy, half-defiant look in her eyes which, nevertheless, did not fall before his scrutiny.

'Since when, my dear Nell, have you grown shy of—old Mrs. Gray?' he asked, gently.

'Not of her, nor—nor of Angus Gray; but——' she hesitated.

'Well, of whom?' asked her father, encouragingly.

'I don't like the other men, papa,' burst out Nell; 'they are rude. I think they laugh at me. That is why I have been so long in going there.'

'Brutes!' exclaimed her father, pressing

her close to him. 'You shall never go near the place again, my darling.'

'Oh, but yes, dear, I *must*. It is the right thing to do. I must go,' said Nell, decidedly. 'But if only you would come with me?' she pleaded.

Mr. Eveleigh hesitated no longer. 'If you will go, child, of course I must take you. Why did you never tell me this before?'

'It was of no consequence as long as I could keep away. And old Mrs. Gray is a lovely old woman, but disappointing—very disappointing!' she added, by way of explaining that she had had no desire to brave the 'rudeness' of the other men for her sake.

'Better keep away still, Nell. I wonder if you would believe me if I were to tell you that Gray would not thank you for this demonstration in his favour?' said Mr. Eveleigh, gravely.

It was Nell's turn now to look in her father's face, to see what he meant ; and as she looked, the recollection of that morning she had found him rousing out of sleep and muttering Gray's name in fear and anguish came back to her. But something held her back from asking her father if he was *afraid* of Angus Gray, and why. The idea was so painful that she put it away from her quickly, and answered her father's question simply.

‘I should say you did not understand Angus Gray as well as I do, if you were to tell me he would not be glad that we should show we believed in him.’

‘Very well, Nell, we will go. But remember, I have warned you. He will not thank us,’ said Mr. Eveleigh, in the same grave voice. ‘What o'clock is it ?’ he asked, after a moment's pause. If this disagreeable business was to be done, the sooner it was over the better.

Nell looked at her watch—‘Just about five. There is plenty of time before dinner,’ she answered, eagerly.

‘Then let us go at once,’ said her father, rising ; and in a few minutes more they set out.

‘We must go by the town, that people may see where we are going. The Liaston ladies are always about when you go down the town. Do you know, father dear, I think sometimes they take a great interest in you. Some of them call so perseveringly, though they never get in ;’ and Nell laughed, but her father did not respond to her laugh by even a smile. To be looked on as a hero, when he was in reality the cause of all the trouble about Joe Mutter, was abhorrent to him. And as they went down the high street, his eyes opened by Ralph Curgenwen’s hints respecting the gossip with regard to Nell, and conscious of the share in the public

interest the conduct ascribed to him on the night of Joe's loss had excited, he was painfully aware of the comment to which they were subjected. The shopkeepers came to their doors, on one pretence or another, to stare; the gentlemen lounging about took advantage of the occasion to stop them and shake hands with them, and pay Mr. Eveleigh some broad compliments, ostentatiously refraining from looking at Nell as they mentioned Gray's name, and the absurdity of the suspicions entertained of him. And Mr. Eveleigh forced himself to bear it patiently and to talk about it, and to explain clearly that it was Angus Gray and not himself who had incurred any danger there might have been in the search for Mutter. A new-born sense of the expediency of conciliating a public that it was within the bounds of possibility might one day sit in judgment on himself made his manner so much pleasanter

than it had ever been before, that Nell stood by and listened in surprise ; and several men went home and told their families that they believed Eveleigh only required to be better known to be liked by everybody ; and that, *of course*, being a sensible fellow, like themselves, he scouted the idea of Gray's having had anything to do with the business, except in a way that did him credit. That slow progress down High Street was an ordeal worse than any Mr. Eveleigh had ever gone through in his life before, and the pain of it consisted in knowing himself to be acting a lie, and acting it well too.

‘Why, papa,’ said Nell, when they were out of the town, ‘we have had more conversations to-day than we have ever had since we came to Liaston ! And how gracious you were, even to “that fool Chudleigh,” as you used to call the man in the purple stockings !’

Mr. Eveleigh winced. 'I thought you brought me out on purpose to demonstrate in favour of Gray, Nell,' he said, in an odd voice.

'And you have, papa, you have! They won't be able to say *you* believe in their lies!' answered Nell, exultingly.

Presently, as they came near the station houses, Nell came closer to her father, and took hold of his arm. Looking up, he was vexed to see that they had chosen an unfortunate moment for everything but this notion of Nell's, of proving that they believed in Angus Gray. The delays in the high street had brought them down to the harbour about the time when all the men connected with the business there—sailors, fishermen, coast-guards—were lounging about, chatting together in groups, with their pipes in their mouths. The boat-houses and store-houses belonging to the service were all on a

level with the quays, and round the doors of these houses several of the men stood idle. To the right of them, and nearer the pier stood the flag-staff, and pacing up and down in front of it was the one man who at that moment was still on duty. It was growing dusk as Mr. Eveleigh and Nell approached this point, which they must pass before they could turn up to the dwelling-houses. Nell's evident shyness and dislike of the groups of men made Mr. Eveleigh so intent on observing them for a sign of the rudeness she had told him of, that he forgot why they had reason to be now more interested in himself than in his daughter. But it was poor Mutter's harmless fun that Nell had surprised, when he thought she was not looking; and now there was no Joe to make the others laugh, and none of them were great believers in or propagators of the gossip of Liaston with regard to her. They were solemn and re-

spectful to a degree as the Eveleighs went by, took their pipes out, and touched their caps to Mr. Eveleigh, and wondered that he never stopped to ask whether anything had been found belonging to Joe; while he, who had actually for the moment forgotten Joe, looked at them with anger in his eyes, and made the barest possible response to their civilities. But though they did not believe in the gossip they knew of it, and many very different looks were interchanged as the father and daughter passed on towards the flagstaff, and an almost imperceptible general movement began to influence every man to draw a little nearer to it. Neither Mr. Eveleigh nor Nell had yet observed that the man pacing up and down was Gray. But he had seen them coming a long way off, and a tumult of love and hate rose in him at the sight. When they were close upon him he turned abruptly towards the sea, and, putting up his glass,

remained motionless and apparently absorbed in observation of a harmless-looking little craft some way out to sea. They had almost passed him when Nell came to a sudden halt in front of him. 'Ah! here he is!' she exclaimed, and forgetting her shyness in her rejoicing that so many people would now see how her father treated Angus Gray, she glanced back to see if they were noticed; and instantly grew shy again when she found so many faces turned in their direction.

'We were coming to see you, were we not, papa?' she then said, giving her father's arm a little forward movement. 'Shake hands with him,' she whispered hurriedly, as at the sound of her voice Gray dropped his telescope and uncovered his head, but did not answer her greeting. Mechanically, in the confusion of the moment, Mr. Eveleigh held out his hand. But Gray made no

movement of response. Pale as death, he looked straight into Mr. Eveleigh's eyes with a curious searching glance which, after the first surprise, was met by the latter with unflinching calmness, and the hand that had dropped by Mr. Eveleigh's side was again held out to him, and Mr. Eveleigh's imperious voice said clearly and distinctly, but too low for others to overhear, 'Take it, Angus Gray, for your own sake, for everybody's sake;' and as he spoke he glanced round, as Nell had done, with intentional significance. Angus's eyes followed his, and a shade of contempt crossed his face. Then he looked at Nell, who was gazing bewildered and wistful from the one pale face to the other, and as his eyes met hers a sudden quiver of pain made his lips tremble. He hesitated, half held out his hand, but before Mr. Eveleigh could take it, drew it back, and with a supreme effort, in pity for the meaning she might come to attach to his refusal, took upon

himself the unworthiness, the shame, and all the awful possibilities the misconstruction of his words might bring about, for his love's sake, and to spare her a passing suspicion of the father she so dearly loved, saying, in a voice harsh and hard with misery, 'It isn't fit that I should . . . accept such an honour *now* !'

Yet even as he spoke, with the intention of sparing Nell, he could not keep back the anger that flashed in his eyes as they once again rested on Mr. Eveleigh before he turned away ; and to Mr. Eveleigh his words sounded simply ironical.

'What did I say, Nell ?' said her father who had passed quickly on with her at the same moment that Gray turned from them ; 'did I not tell you he would not thank us for this ?'

There was neither anger nor pride in her father's voice ; only a quiet hopelessness that added to Nell's bewilderment.

‘What does he mean?’ she said, anxiously; ‘not that he, not that you . . . Oh, father, dear, what is all this mystery? what does it mean?’ she added, her voice sinking so low as almost to be a whisper.

‘It means, my Nell, it means . . . God! child, you heard what he said!’ exclaimed Mr. Eveleigh, in an agony.

Nell asked him no more questions after that. Again there came to her that vague fear of evil that had haunted her for days, and with it a more defined conviction that it was in some way connected with Gray. Could he and her father have had any quarrel or dispute, of which she had been kept in ignorance? There had been in her father’s manner in this interview none of the fear of Gray that she had believed to possess his mind when he asked her if Gray would come between him and danger for her sake. Angus might have spared himself the misery

of equivocal words, for nothing short of his own confession could ever have persuaded Nell to suspect her father of any wrongdoing in connection with Mutter's disappearance. Her mind never even glanced at the possibility, while she could not avoid the supposition that the trouble that had come to her father came in some way through this man's death. And Gray himself she never doubted for a moment. She said to herself that there was a horrible mistake somewhere, and that it was a misery to her father and Gray, the two people . . . 'No, not that, thought Nell, setting hastily aside the identification of interest; 'of course it is papa's trouble that grieves me most, but I feel for Gray's . . . yes, I feel for Gray's:' and the tears came to her eyes as she recalled his altered face, so worn, and white, and weary, and all for an unjust suspicion, that it seemed to her it was impossible that anybody in

their senses could look in his face and entertain for a moment. There was nothing more said between her and her father as they walked quickly home, in an opposite and more roundabout direction than that in which they had come, and which they had turned towards with a simultaneous movement, neither of them caring to pass again by the flagstaff and the storehouses, till they were close to the cottage, and then Mr. Eveleigh said, with some abruptness, 'You may have misunderstood me, Nell. I think what Gray probably meant was, that he did not care to be patronised by me, because he was under an unworthy suspicion, which he evidently is aware of and resents. Gray is a proud fellow, as you have often told me. His mention of the "honour" I was offering him was ironical, I fancy.'

'Possibly; and yet he is never rude, papa,' she said, unsuspectingly. 'It is a

dreadful thing that he should suffer so unjustly,' she added, coming closer to her father, and looking up at him appealingly; 'can nothing be done to clear him?' she asked, anxiously.

A sort of shiver passed over Mr. Eveleigh, and he returned her look with a very strange expression in his eyes. 'He is not accused, Nell. He is in no danger,' he said, in rather a hard voice.

'Papa, you are not half sorry enough for him! Did you not see how altered he is?' Nell said, indignantly, her face flushing a little, and the tears gathering to her eyes again.

'He may have other troubles, child. If I am not sorry enough, my little girl is too sorry,' he said gently, but with a certain intention in his voice. 'After all, what is the man to us?'

'He is my *friend*,' said Nell, firmly, swal-

lowing her tears, 'and—and he might come between you and danger for my sake, you said. Surely, then, he *is* something to us?'

The moment Nell had spoken she repented of her words. Mr. Eveleigh turned deadly pale, and without another word or look passed by her into the house.

CHAPTER XLII.

GRAY'S SUPPORTERS.

MR. EVELEIGH had spoken in such a low voice to Gray when he ordered him to take his hand, that nobody had heard his words. Angus Gray's answer, on the contrary, had been spoken in the harsh, unmodulated tones of anger and misery. Those men who were nearest the flag-staff saw the offered hand twice rejected, and heard the words with which the second rejection had been accompanied: 'It isn't fit that I should—accept such an honour *now*!' and a quick glance of surprise and intelligence passed from one to the other, and George Ivie shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, 'What did I

tell you!' Gradually, as they had drawn near, they moved back to their original positions, with a new and deeply-interesting subject for discussion in their minds.

'This here's a rum start! ain't it, Bill? You and me would ha' been proud to give a paw to His Gracious Majesty, wouldn't we? You and me isn't growed so tall yet as we can afford to look down on the attentions of a gentleman as has such a pretty girl a-hanging on his arm!' said a sailor, who was one of the onlookers, addressing one of the coast-guard, who made no reply, not choosing to comment to outsiders on one of themselves. But George Ivie, who stood near, said significantly: 'You and Bill maybe wouldn't be so squeamish about putting a dirty paw in the gentleman's clean one!'

'You shut up, George!' said the man addressed as Bill, angrily, and pretending to take his words literally, he added, for the

sailor's benefit: 'I should like to see your hand alongside o' Gray's, my boy! I know which o' the two's the whitest, if you don't!'

George flushed with rage.

'There's a *colour* about his as I don't envy of him!' he said venomously.

Bill cast on him a look of intense disgust, and turned away, imprudently leaving George and the sailor to continue their conversation, that he might communicate the former's speech to John Davidson.

'Where was he the night as Joe was lost? that's the question as I wants answered,' said George, 'and that's what nobody's come to the bottom o' yet, as fur as I knows!'

'Ah, tell us now! I never heard tell o' that!' and the sailor and George drew closer together and whispered to each other, the sailor casting curious glances at Gray from time to time as their conversation proceeded.

'I don't like the looks of it, John, by God!

I don't now. But I wasn't a-going to say so afore that beast Ivie. See to him now a-whispering and a-backbiting!' said Bill to his mates, but addressing John Davidson particularly. Several of them were standing together in a group.

'Look here, Bill and all, you knows as Ivie hates Gray, and there's nothing as would please him better nor to bring Gray down in the dust! How you can let yourselves think the ill you are thinkin' o' the one because o' the slanders o' the other, beats me! I'm d——d if it don't!' exclaimed John, indignantly.

'You'll not deny as Gray's a changed man since the day as we lost Joe?' said one.

'I'm not a-wanting to deny it,' said John, resolutely. 'If I was to lose my Jane in the course o' nature, let alone in a mystery, you'd soon see me a changed man, I can tell you!'

'Oh! come now! You're not a-going to

make out as how a friend, as you're not particular friends with neither, is the same as a man's wife!' said Bill, who had no wife.

'Well, as to that, you're no judge, Bill,' interposed one of the married ones; 'there's many men as I knows as *would* be changed men if they lost their "Janes" and "Marys" and "Susans," *I* can tell you!' he added grimly, with a short laugh, in which the others joined.

'And so, as we may say, Davidson's Jane ain't not to say just to the point!' said another man, bringing round the subject to Angus.

'I'd liefer believe such a thing of myself than of Gray. It's the d——dest lie as ever a man spoke!' reiterated John, whose faith was strong if his powers of reasoning were weak.

'And after all, though I'm willin' to agree as George *is* a ill-tongued beast, *between our-*

selves now, where was Gray that night ?' said Bill, lowering his voice.

To this nobody replied. Presently, after they had smoked awhile in silence, one man, taking the pipe out of his mouth, said : 'What I says is, show me a *reason* for such a thing! and ye can't, that I knows. So I inclines to Gray. But I don't deny as his goings on is queer. Look at him now, a refusin' to shake hands with a gentleman as took his po'trait as is a hangin' up at Mrs. Gray's this very minit! And the young lass as he was such friends to! He'll have done for himself wi' her, I'm thinkin', though Joe, poor fellow, he allays would have it as she had a fancy for Gray as was serious like!'

'Aye, aye, poor Joe! we misses his jokes, don't we, boys?' said one of the older men, sadly. And a deep silence fell on the group while each paid a tribute to their lost mate's memory. It was broken by John Davidson,

who was anxiously scanning the groups of talkers.

‘By G—d! look there! If Ivie hasn’t got into the middle of them, and isn’t a-holdin’ forth with his evil tongue like blazes; and see at them all a-lookin’ at Gray, poor fellow. I tell you what, I’m a-going to the flag-staff to show as I ain’t nothin’ to do wi’ *them!*’ He added, ‘Who’s a-coming wi’ me to speak to Gray?’

Without waiting for an answer he turned away, and not hurrying himself sauntered up to the place where Gray was pacing up and down. Presently, Bill followed him slowly; then another and another, till all the coast-guard, except George Ivie, had clustered round the flag-staff, their kindly feeling for his present uncomfortable position, and a desire to uphold the honour of one of themselves, overcoming for the moment their doubts of Gray. Not one of them, not even

Davidson, made the faintest allusion to the scene that had taken place. They spoke of everything but that—abused Millar as was their custom ; grumbled about their potatoes, and the dearness of coal ; spoke of the ball-cartridge practice that was coming on ; of the merits and demerits of the lieutenant who was coming to inspect their drill ; of which of them would go to sea next ; when they wanted their ‘leaves,’ and why, &c. &c. Angus Gray understood them perfectly well, but he also took no notice. Now and then he joined in their conversations as he passed and repassed them. There was no occasion for his perpetual motion, but the very exercise was soothing to him. His misery was lightened by their sympathy, and his eyes were dimmed with the moisture of unshed tears many a time as he pointed his glass at some vessel which he could not see for these same tears. They lingered by him for an hour or more,

till gradually the groups of talkers dispersed. George Ivie, not caring to pass the flag-staff, took his way with his new sailor friend, towards the town. Then one by one, with a nod of more friendliness than they had bestowed upon him for days, Gray's supporters left him and went to their various avocations. Only John Davidson lingered still. It had grown dark by this time, but a faint light showed on the horizon, and the moon was rising quickly. John, who was a reading man, and of a poetical turn, looked to the fading light of the day, and at the increasingly brilliant light of the night, and coming close to Gray, said in a hesitating voice: 'It's a uncommon dark night when there's not some sort o' light by fits and starts, Angus, and there's allays the mornin' a-comin'!'

'But it's long to "win thro"' till mornin', as mother says, John,' he answered, sadly. 'This was your doing to-night, Davidson,' he

added, presently ; 'and thank you for it with all my heart,' concluded Angus, laying a hand on Davidson's shoulder.

'No, no ; I only said as I was a-going to stand by you, come what might. Every man came of his own free-will,' said John, eagerly.

'And yet it's plain to be seen they doubt me, John,' said Angus, wearily.

To this Davidson returned no answer for a while. Then he said encouragingly : 'They're most on 'em sensible fellows, they'll come round again. Don't you be a-feared !'

'I don't blame them. They're good fellows, as they've proved to-night, at heart. Tell them I took it kindly of them,' said Angus, in the same sad voice.

'Gray, you could bring 'em round to you whenever you liked, if you would only be a bit more open-like to 'em,' said Davidson, seriously ; adding, as Angus made no reply, 'If you was to answer that question for ex-

ample, as George Ivie is allus a a-askin' of, *where* was you that night afore we went out after Joe?'

There was a silence of a few moments, while Davidson waited anxiously for Angus' answer. He had turned towards the sea when John began to speak, and was holding his face towards the moonlight. Not a muscle of it changed as he listened, and he said quietly, 'I have answered it. I have said I was taking a stroll to pass the time while Mutter was away.'

'That's *no* answer, and you know it, Angus Gray!' exclaimed Davidson, a little hotly. 'What Ivie wants to know, is, where away you "strolled," as you call it, on a dark wet night, as every man of us would ha' been thankful to get a chance o' passin' in the house!'

'It's all the answer I can give, John,' returned Angus, with decision. 'I'm fond of

dark nights, and stormy nights, nowadays, as you may have noticed, John!' he added, with a short laugh.

"Yes, I've noticed. But you might trust *me*, Gray!' Davidson said, in a vexed voice.

Angus laid a hand on his shoulder again. 'Nobody could trust a man more than I trust you, John Davidson,' he answered, promptly.

'And yet you won't tell me what's troubling you,' said John, doubtfully; 'and it's true, Angus, what they say, all on 'em. You're a changed man these days!'

'A man doesn't lose a friend like Joe Mutter, and feel nothing,' Gray answered, gravely; 'and I tell you nothing, John, because——'

'There, don't say it!' interposed Davidson, hastily. 'There's a something as is on your mind *more'n* Joe's loss, Angus Gray.'

To this Gray made no reply.

'And the long and short of it is, Gray,'

continued Davidson, when he had waited in vain for an answer, 'You *don't* put no trust in me, that's as clear as day!'

He was turning away, vexed and disappointed, when Angus stopped him, saying, with some agitation: 'For God's sake, John, don't you turn against me too?'

'Never a fear o' that, Angus!' said Davidson, heartily, turning again. 'Whether you trusts me or not's neither here nor there. *I* trusts *you* through thick and thin, and there's my hand on it!' and he held out his hand, in which Angus instantly laid his own. Davidson wrung it hard, and as he did so, said, with a little triumphant laugh: 'I *knowed* as it wasn't *your* hand as wasn't fit for the honour o' a clasp o' old Eveleigh's "*now!*"' and before Angus could answer, he was running off up the hill to his 'Jane,' as fast as his feet could carry him.

Gray could not help smiling at the little

ruse. 'And yet even he had a grain of doubt, or he wouldn't have tried *that* on!' he said to himself, sadly.

Presently he fell to wondering what he had ever done to earn such ill-will as George Ivie bore him, for he had noticed George's whispers with the sailors and the fishermen, and had seen the curious glances cast at him. But if they had heard his words they would misconstrue, he knew well. What then? If *she* were saved even a passing doubt of her father. What even if she also misconstrued them? Ah! this was the bitterest drop in the bitter cup Gray had poured out for himself. Changed! Yes, he knew he was changed! Could a man go through the daily and hourly struggle he was going through and look the same? And then he began it all over again, and reasoned it all through for the hundredth time, as the last of the idlers having finally disappeared, he extended

his guard from before the flag-staff on to the end of the pier, and leaning against the stonework watched the sea with eyes that never saw it. On the one hand there was his duty to Joe Mutter; on the other, his love for Nell Eveleigh. Because he loved Nell was he to let the murderer of his friend go free, and his early death go unavenged? 'The death that Joe had died for him!' Angus said to himself, with a fresh burst of anguish. By dint of brooding over it all, and putting together the observations he had made on the night of the search, Gray had arrived at a theory not far from the truth. Mr. Eveleigh had dined at Tremore; had then heard the report of the bragging and boasting that had been ascribed to Gray himself; and returning home, full of a justifiable anger, had met the very man, as he supposed, who had so grossly insulted his daughter, and in his rage had struck him such a blow as had sent

him reeling to his death, and fearing for the consequences, while he repented and wished to atone for his passion, had come to the station with the story he had told to seek for help. If Joe had not died, if he had been found wounded and mangled, but alive, Gray could have found it in his heart to forgive and excuse Mr. Eveleigh. If even he had been man enough to own his crime and take the consequences, Gray felt as if he could almost have respected and honoured him for avenging Nell. But now his heart was hardened to him. The man was a coward, and was willing to save himself at another's expense; and Joe was dead, lying deep down in the sea, through his fault. Joe, with his kind heart, and wild ways; his bright laughing face and careless happiness, was the Joe the other men missed. But Angus alone knew the truth, and honesty, and uprightness that underlay the apparent recklessness of

the man, or the worth of the heart and head of the friend he had so sorely neglected while nursing his own selfish troubles, and the agony of remorse was added to the weight of the grieving with which Gray mourned for his lost friend. There were times when he felt that he must speak out and avenge him. But oftener he remembered that the man who had sent Joe to his death was Nell's father. And when he remembered this, he tried to be glad that not only rank and wealth and the prejudices of class came between him and his hopeless longings and vain delusions with regard to Nell, but that this also widened the gulf of separation. But he was not glad. In these last days since he had become aware of the suspicions attaching to himself, and of the pain and suffering they entailed on him, his mind was gradually growing a little calmer. His own suffering seemed in some measure a sort of atonement offered up to

Joe. He faced the possibility for the first time this night, as he remembered the curious suspicious faces that had stared at him to read confirmation of crime in his face, that these same suspicions might grow stronger and stronger—that he might be called upon authoritatively to say where he was when he stood in the rain on the steps of the cottage, and excused his presence there by the words he had so often since repented of: ‘It’s long since I’ve seen you!’ and that this refusal to answer this question and others that he equally could not or would not answer might be turned to his disadvantage; and he knew that if this should be so, more ignominy, more humiliations were in store for him, that he might even be—Gray felt himself shudder as the thought came to him—arrested on suspicion of murder, if the voice of his enemies should wax louder and prevail. It was not for long that these possibilities appalled him.

Courage, and a clear conscience, would carry him through for 'her sweet sake;' and he resolved steadily to bear all—the loss of friends, the loss of character, the horrible suspicion itself; even the knowledge, if such should come to him, that Nell herself had learnt to doubt him, if only by so doing he could save her one pang of pain or shame. In his humble-mindedness it never struck him that his own sufferings could trouble her. The moon was high in the sky, and the water was leaping and gleaming beneath it in a shining pathway to the shore, when eight o'clock rang out from the church tower, and Gray's guard was over for that day. As he roused himself to retrace his steps to the station, his eyes, that had gazed so vacantly out to sea, settled at last consciously on the light on the water, and Davidson's words came back to him. Light always somewhere, shining on everything *at last*.

Sometime this 'black minute' would be at an end, 'and sudden the worst turn the best to the brave,' thought poor Gray, remembering, with some little superstitious comfort in the remembrance, that it was in one of the books Nell had lent him that these thoughts that now came to console him had first attracted him.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

RALPH CURGENWEN was very speedily restored to his ordinary robust health after Farley's visit to him. The very next day he ordered his horse and rode into Liaston, called on all his acquaintances, made the most of his illness, and gathered up all the various opinions on the subject of Joe Mutter's disappearance with the greatest avidity and interest. He also heard of Mr. Eveleigh and Nell having made very decided remarks on the iniquity of those people who could suppose for a moment that Gray had had anything to do with the matter. He saw the chief policeman, and had Dorothy

Challice's story confided to him, and praised the man for keeping the girl's secret, and assured him there was not the slightest occasion for making it known. All he said himself was that he was sorry for the loss of Mutter, as he always liked the fellow as far as he remembered, but if he was dead there was an end of him; it was 'odd' certainly that there should be such an impression in people's minds against Gray, but for his part he was quite satisfied, and so were the police; if the impression remained he would use his influence to get Gray removed to another station. This last remark was voted 'just like Curgenwen's good nature and good sense,' and Ralph's subjects adopted his views as the correct thing, and sneered at the remnant who stuck to their prejudice.

Having disposed of the town, Ralph went to Millar, and succeeded, as he thought at first, admirably in his intention of hearing

from him every word that was to be said on the subject. The little scene at the flag-staff was pronounced by Millar, on whom it had made a totally different impression to what it had done on the men, 'between you and me, Mr. Curgenwen,' to have something under it; but what the something was Millar did not pretend to say. Ralph frowned angrily as he listened to this, ostensibly at the malice of Ivie, which was the only part he clearly understood in the account Millar gave of it, but in reality at hearing that Nell had been mixed up in it. Then he sounded Millar as to the expediency of getting Gray removed, and was not any better pleased to hear that worthy say that he doubted if Gray was the man to run away from an unpleasantness, and that for his part he wouldn't think the better of him if he did anything of the kind; that, as far as his duty was concerned, there wasn't a better man in the service, or one more likely

to rise. From this it will appear that Millar, like Bill, was not inclined to let outsiders think lightly of one of his men, if he could help it; and that whatever his rising doubts might be, he was too just a man to give expression to them without reason.

‘If it was Ivie you was wantin’ to remove, now I wouldn’t interfere. He’s had a bit o’ my mind as he don’t relish, I’m thinkin’. Shouldn’t wonder now, Mr. Curgenwen, if you hears some day soon as I’ve found it convenient to take my missis for a walk over there, and pop her over by mistake! No, I shouldn’t wonder at all if you was to hear that, after what I’ve said to Ivie!’ and Millar laughed heartily.

‘Well,’ said Ralph, with a change of expression, ‘perhaps you have been too hard on the man. I suppose he thinks he has some reason for his suspicions?’

‘None as is worth mentioning,’ returned

Millar; but a cloud came over his face, and Ralph noticed it. However, he said no more, except to advise Millar to reconsider his suggestion as to Gray's removal, adding, 'it is a pity the poor fellow should go through what he will have to go through, if this impression gains ground, absurd as it is; and I don't suppose he has any particular reason for liking to stay at Liaston more than any other place.'

'Well, as to that——' began Millar, while a twinkle of fun came into his keen little eyes; but he stopped in time, remembering that Curgenwen of Tremore was said to be 'court-ing' the young lady in whom he suspected Gray took a deep enough interest to be willing to brave the obloquy of doubts and suspicions of himself rather than leave the place where shelived; and he quickly changed his sentence . . . 'as to that, his mother likes the

place, and she is an old woman who likes her own way, does Mrs. Gray.'

'She wouldn't wish to expose her son to all this, if it could be helped, surely?' said Ralph . . . and by the way he went on, with a laugh of incredulity, 'what's this I hear from Farley, of that old woman being a *lady*? I have often intended to ask you.'

'Well, it's not Mrs. Gray as sets up for a lady, she's a sensible old body as ever I see, is Mrs. Gray. And I don't blame it on her that she's a bit proud. For her own mother *was* a lady, I've heard tell,' said Millar, taking some sort of pride in the fact himself, with all an Englishman's respect for superiority, 'and, for the matter o' that, you may have noticed yourself as Angus Gray has a look as is different to the rest of us, Mr. Curgenwen?'

'I can't say I've noticed it, Millar. It takes something more than good looks to

make a gentleman !' said Ralph, with not a very pleasant laugh.

'So it does,' said Millar, quietly looking Ralph over with an odd expression in his face ; 'so it does, Mr. Curgenwen ; and Gray has the ways you was thinking of, in my humble opinion. Old Eveleigh's my way o' thinkin' too, or I'm much mistaken,' he added, with malicious intent, his little eyes sparkling, but his other features as grave as a judge. 'And they *do* say,' he continued, unable to resist the temptation to triumph over Ralph, 'as how *Miss* Eveleigh sets great store by Gray, which, it stands to reason, shows as he's not just like the rest of us ; don't it now, Mr. Curgenwen ?'

Ralph felt the liveliest inclination to bestow on Millar a cut with his riding-whip, and a dark-red colour rose in his face.

'And I shouldn't wonder, Mr. Curgenwen,' continued Millar, musingly, before

Ralph could answer him ; ‘ I shouldn’t wonder a morsel if I haven’t to touch my cap to him some day myself, for all he’s under me now. I’m not wantin’ to say nothing against the service. It’s treated me well enough. But they favours a man like Gray, that I know well enough ! ’

‘ He’ll have to clear himself of this business before he gets much of a rise in life,’ said Ralph, savagely. ‘ By your own showing, Mr. Eveleigh refused to shake hands with him yesterday.’

‘ Begging your pardon, sir, *it was Gray as refused to shake hands with Mr. Eveleigh,*’ retorted Millar, sharply, with a certain significance in his voice.

Ralph’s red colour faded slowly into yellow, and he made no answer for a moment. His heart seemed to stop beating, and the first thought was for himself. *What* had Gray discovered ? How much, how little ?

‘ D—d impertinent of the fellow ! ’ he said,

when the moment was passed, 'unless, indeed . . . unless his hands were dirty !' Ralph added, with a forced laugh, but in as significant a voice as Millar's. And giving the latter no chance of reply, he bade him an abrupt 'Good morning,' and walked quickly away to the town.

It had been also Ralph's intention to call at the cottage, but Millar had disturbed his equanimity considerably, and he altered his mind, and went home instead. Ava noticed that he was more gloomy than he had been the evening before, and petted him and waited on him, thinking he was tired from his ride.

'Did you see the Eveleighs, Ralph ?' she asked, with a blush, partly because she wanted to know, and partly because Nell was a subject of conversation that always roused Ralph to interest. And the question certainly roused him effectually now. His

face flushed, and a look of determination came into his eyes. And yet he seemed to have a difficulty in answering the question. At last he said, slowly, 'No, Ava. And before I see them again, it would be as well that you and I should come to some sort of understanding about them.'

'Understanding!' repeated Ava, growing more and more red, and her heart beginning to beat. 'Had Mr. Eveleigh been speaking to her brother?' she asked herself.

'Yes, *understanding*. You haven't of course forgotten that I am *not* the master here?' said Ralph, in rather a hard voice.

'Oh, dear Ralph, I never do remember it, you *know* I never do,' she said reproachfully.

'I know you have been very good about it, Ava,' said Ralph with some heartiness: 'but things seem likely to change. If you were to marry for instance,' and he looked keenly at her.

A troubled look came over her face, and she returned his look with a questioning gaze.

‘Or if I were to marry,’ Ralph went on, keeping his eyes on her face, ‘there is no reason why I should not. I am not a beggar. But still you must see that Curgenwen of Tremore and Ralph Curgenwen of nowhere in particular are two different people.’

‘If a girl loved you, Ralph,’ began Ava, hesitatingly.

‘But supposing a girl did *not*, and yet I wanted to marry her? In the one case I should have a chance; in the other none.’

‘It would make not the least difference to a girl like Nell Eveleigh,’ said Ava quickly.

‘But it would to a man like Eveleigh,’ returned Ralph. ‘And of course I should have to explain the whole matter to him. As far as I can see, Miss Eveleigh would do anything her father told her to do, I *think*, yes, I

think he would tell her to marry me if I were to present myself as Curgenwen of Tremore. That of course I can't do, and I wouldn't if I could, unless—— Ava—— we may as well speak plainly to one another, don't you think, for neither you nor I are young enough to let the romance of the thing overwhelm all other considerations, are we?' and Ralph laughed a little uncomfortably.

As for Ava, who though she was not young, was yet at her first romance, she entirely disagreed with his remark, but did not dare to say so. So she smiled a little weak smile which might mean anything, and said in rather a trembling voice, not feeling sure what he would say next.

'I am listening anxiously, Ralph.'

'Well, I thought you would take it sensibly. What I was going to say was, there are your own interests to be considered. It is for you to decide whether you prefer to be

Miss Curgenwen *of Tremore*, for the rest of your life or not. For, you see, I'm positive of one thing, and that is that no earthly considerations would influence Eveleigh in the smallest degree in comparison with his daughter's happiness and interest, and he himself would be the last man to come between her and a possible inheritance. You can see what I mean?' he asked eagerly. Ava's pretty blushes all died away, she looked at her brother with some indignation and said firmly in her clear cold tones :

'It seems to me it is premature to discuss possibilities that may never come to pass.'

'Oh! nonsense,' exclaimed Ralph. 'Come, now, Ava, what is the good of pretending to *me* that you don't know Eveleigh likes you? What does he come here for, I wonder? There is not much love lost between him and me, I can tell you! And as to possibilities that may never come to pass—well, *my* mind's

made up, whatever yours may be,' concluded Ralph, the hard lines about his mouth deepening. He sat looking at her, and scarcely recognised her, so much her face was fallen away from its usually placid calm. Her lips were pressed firmly together, and her eyes were fixed on vacancy with an expression of deep and perturbed thought. At last she said :

'Let me quite understand, Ralph. You mean to propose to Miss Eveleigh ?'

'*And* to marry her,' supplemented Ralph, resolutely.

'And you think that you will not be able to marry her, unless you present yourself to her under false pretences ; and you wish me to aid you in keeping up these false pretences ?'

Ralph coloured angrily.

'And I also think that if *you wish to marry Mr. Eveleigh*, these "false pretences,"

as you call them, and which we have been keeping up for years, by the way, had better be kept up *a little longer*. That is all. You can ease your conscience afterwards if you choose—after I am *engaged* to Miss Eveleigh, that is. It really isn't so much that I am asking of you, Ava, and for your own sake, too! Just simply that you should say nothing to the contrary if Eveleigh chooses to take for granted, as of course he will do, that this dear old place is mine!' Ralph sighed as he finished his sentence more calmly than he began it, a real sigh from his heart. If by giving up Nell he could have secured this "dear old place" for himself, he would have done so willingly. But he had been 'such a fool' as to think Ava safe when buried at Tremore with no one to speak to but Mr. Eveleigh; he had wit enough to recognise that she was not likely to allow him to dictate to her in this instance if, as he

was sure it had, her heart had spoken at last, and she really cared for 'the old fellow,' as Ralph used to call Mr. Eveleigh to himself contemptuously. He was altogether wrong in his assumptions as far as Mr. Eveleigh was concerned. The latter had never had the smallest intention of proposing to Ava, and Tremore would not have seriously attracted him, either for Nell or himself. But Ralph was in total ignorance of Mr. Eveleigh's plans, though he still held to his first impression that there was a reason of some sort for the retired life they led at the cottage. What Ralph wanted at present was simply to gain Mr. Eveleigh over to favour his suit to Nell, trusting to his own ingenuity, in which not unreasonably he put some faith, to parry any enquiries that might be made as to pecuniary matters in the beginning. This he thought he could not do unless Ava also could be persuaded not to be too confidential

to her new friend and would-be lover. If once he was himself engaged to Nell and matters advanced so far as that the question of settlements should arise, the truth come out, and consequent objections be made, *then* Ralph would bring his knowledge of certain matters concerning Mr. Eveleigh into play. Then, but not till then. Mr. Curgenwen preferred to do things in a pleasant way if possible; but if they could not so be accomplished, he was not very squeamish as to the means to an end. Mr. Eveleigh's words on the night he left Tremore with respect to the place had at the time frightened Ralph, but on reflection he came to the conclusion that they were a mere expression of envy; and hence his exaggerated idea of the importance Nell and her father would attach to his position at Tremore.

‘Well,’ said Ava at last, after a rather long silence, ‘I will say nothing unless I am asked a direct question; that is all I can

promise, and Ralph,' she added, colouring painfully, 'it is for *your* sake not for my own that I should keep silent.'

Ralph smiled ; but he crossed over to her and gave her a kiss, saying soothingly, 'I know it is, you dear, good girl. By the way, Ava, now I come to think of it, our future relations will be rather queer ! I shall be able to say like that fellow I congratulated last year on his marriage, what few fellows besides he and I *could* say, " My mother-in-law is *so* nice ! "' and Ralph, thoroughly content for the moment at his success, went into a roar of laughter as was his custom at his own jokes, causing poor Ava's cheeks to flame worse than ever ; though she smiled because the joke was Ralph's, and she was used to his bad taste, and too much attached to him to resent it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

RALPH'S PROPOSAL.

HAVING, as he had said, made up his mind, Mr. Curgenwen thought that the sooner he put his determinations into practice the better, and accordingly he took his courage in his hands and presented himself at the cottage not many days after his conversation with his sister, and requested a private interview with Mr. Eveleigh. But he was received by Nell herself, who begged him, if his business was not very urgent, to defer it for the moment, as her father was not very well.

‘But it is *very* urgent,’ said Ralph, a cloud gathering on his dark face.

‘Then tell it to me,’ said Nell placidly.

Ralph looked at her curiously, flushed up, hesitated, and then said with anxiety that was not feigned, for Mr. Eveleigh’s illness might circumvent his plans, ‘I hope you are not anxious about your father? Is he really ill?’

‘He *says* he is quite well,’ Nell answered quickly; ‘but I am sure he is not. He has never been well since the night he dined with you last. He got so wet and tired in the search for that poor man, you know.’

‘Ah, yes; so I heard. A very mysterious business,’ said Ralph, shaking his head. ‘I was speaking to Millar about it only a day or so ago, and advising him to get that poor fellow Gray removed to another station,’ he added, looking intently at Nell as he spoke.

‘Angus Gray is not likely to run away from an unjust suspicion!’ said Nell, a little indignantly, but with no other sign of emotion.

‘Just what Millar said ; but I don’t know, you know, Miss Eveleigh, that there’s much common sense in taking that unpractical kind of view of things,’ responded Ralph.

‘If you were in Gray’s place you would run away, you mean?’ asked Nell politely, and as if she was anxious for information.

Ralph coloured.

‘You use an odd expression ; but, yes—well, if you like to put it so, I should “run away,”’ he said with a laugh, and an assumption of frankness that was easy to him.

‘So I thought.’ Then after a decent pause she added : ‘But Angus Gray is a man of a good deal of courage, I think,’ unable to resist making the implied inference.

Ralph laughed uneasily.

‘A fellow with plenty of cheek, it strikes me, Miss Eveleigh,’ he said harshly, ‘if that’s what you call courage. I heard of that little

scene at the flag-staff, by the way,' he added, with some significance in his voice.

'Then,' said Nell eagerly, leaning forward and locking her fingers together with a little gesture of entreaty, 'perhaps then you could explain it to me, Mr. Curgenwen?' She was so anxious to understand it that she forgot to resent the first half of Ralph's sentence.

'Well, now, that is just exactly what I wanted to ask you to do!' Ralph answered with a laugh. 'It was Millar who told me, and I didn't exactly understand. Let me see. I think he said you and your father happened to be passing——'

'No,' said Nell, 'we did not happen to be passing; we went on purpose to see Mrs. Gray and her son, to let the people see that we did not care in the least for the absurd report.'

'Ah! Mr. Eveleigh thinks it absurd, then?' asked Ralph.

‘My father? Of *course* he does!’ Nell answered, with scorn curling her lips at the very question.

‘Ah!’ again ejaculated Ralph, in an odd tone. ‘Well, then,’ he went on, ‘he offered Gray his hand; very unnecessary condescension, I should say, by the way.’

‘My father did not think so, Mr. Curgenwen. He has some perception, and knows——’

‘When he sees a prince in disguise, I suppose,’ interposed Ralph, with a sneering laugh.

Nell flushed an angry crimson, but she only said quietly, finishing her sentence without noticing the interruption, ‘When a man is worthy of his respect and regard.’

‘Well, at all events, Gray himself seems to have agreed with me that the attention was unnecessary, since he had the impertinence to refuse it, I hear, and before all the people about, too.’

‘There was no *impertinence*,’ said Nell, adding incautiously, in her desire to defend Gray, ‘he said it was not fitting that he should take it.’

‘Indeed, I didn’t hear that! not fitting—h’m—that’s queer! I shouldn’t have said he was a humble-minded individual—h’m—however, he may have a *conscience*!’ said Ralph maliciously. He was aggravated by Nell’s championship into making an insinuation that he knew to be a lie.

‘I don’t understand you at all; pray speak more plainly,’ said Nell, feeling that there was some wrong beneath his words, but being quite at sea as to what that wrong might be.

‘It’s as plain as—as—a pike-staff!’ exclaimed Ralph. ‘I wonder you don’t see it. Mr. Eveleigh offers to shake hands, Gray refuses; well, that must mean either that he knows himself to be unworthy of the honour

of touching a gentleman's hand—or—or the other way of looking at it is so absurd that it seems ridiculous to suggest it,' said Ralph, forcing a smile, which was a mere parting of the lips, that showed his gleaming white teeth. 'Or that he considered the gentleman unworthy to touch his! You can see for yourself that the first is the natural inference,' and again he tried to smile as he looked at Nell with a curious significance. To his surprise she did not take up his words by any vehement defence. She gave him one scared glance, and her heart seemed to stop beating, and she felt herself turning white to the lips. What fear was this that had seized her at his words? Her presence of mind for a moment entirely deserted her. Poor Nell! she was so young, and so unused to concealment, that she could not quite command her countenance, and yet some instinct made her strive to keep Ralph from

the knowledge of her fear, and she kept silence for a moment lest her voice should betray her also. Ralph, looking at her white downcast face, the compressed lips and rigid clasp of the hands, made sure his shot at Gray had pierced her heart and her mind with a conviction of the *possibility* at least of his unworthiness. And while a fiend-like joy stirred his little soul, an equally fiend-like jealousy of her deep feeling for the man he had persuaded himself was his rival took hold of him.

‘You see, Miss Eveleigh, I felt bound to make light of this business about Gray in Liaston; and knowing as I do how much you think of the man, made me all the more anxious to do so,’ he began again, with an air of great frankness and some concern; ‘but between you and me, the question that I hear an enemy of his is clamouring to have answered, and that nobody has yet got

Gray to answer, rather goes against him in my mind, I must confess. Of course you will understand that this is *quite* between ourselves?' Ralph interrupted himself to ask eagerly. He said to himself that all is fair in love and war, and he thought no harm of dropping into Nell's private ear his cruel insinuations against Angus. But he had no desire or intention of bringing a serious charge against an innocent man, and did not wish to have his words repeated. His air of concern and frankness imposed upon the girl, as it had many a time imposed on wiser people than she, and she raised her eyes to his with an anxious enquiry in them, and forced her trembling lips to say steadily,

'You need be in no fear that *I* shall ever repeat a single word that might harm Angus Gray.' This was not the spirit in which Ralph wished her to receive his com-

munication, but it was something that she had not refused to listen to it.

‘Well, the question is simply one of time and place. *Where* was Angus Gray between the time that Joe Mutter started for Culve, and the time when he was met by all the other men coming into the station as they were going out?’ and Ralph threw himself back in his chair, and managed to assume a look of perplexity and annoyance; and looked at Nell, with his head a little inclined to one side, for help to solve the problem. Her eyes opened wide with astonishment, and some colour returned slowly to her face.

‘Do you mean that Gray *refuses* to say where he was then?’ she asked quickly.

‘Yes; or rather he will not specify time and place, but says he has nothing to say but that he was taking a stroll! Fancy that on a pouring wet night!’ and Ralph allowed him-

self to laugh derisively. As he spoke, a vision of Gray standing on the steps of the cottage garden in the rain, the fitful moon lighting up his pale haggard face, rose up before Nell; and his involuntary reproach sounded in her ears, 'it's long since I've seen you;' and in that moment it seemed to her that she could understand that he would not choose to tell to everybody that he had watched and waited on such a night for the mere chance of a sight of her. But that was no reason why she should not remove any bad impression his vague replies might have created in Mr. Curgenwen's mind, especially as upon the whole she thought Ralph was inclined to believe that this was the only mysterious part of the events of that night as far as Gray was concerned; therefore she said gravely,

'I know where Angus Gray was at that time, and so if you hear any importance

attached to the matter again, you can say that I have told you that I know, and that you are quite satisfied.'

'You — know — where — he — was!' exclaimed Ralph with a gasp, and turning a pale yellow colour in the face; 'Oh come, now, Miss Eveleigh! you don't expect me to believe that!'

'Certainly, since I tell you that I know,' Nell answered. 'Why should you not believe it?' And she looked at him with some surprise and haughtiness. Ralph returned her look with one of at least equal surprise.

'Well! you know—it seems odd that you should know, don't you think?' he stammered at last, with an uneasy laugh. 'Perhaps you sent him some message?' he added, seizing eagerly upon the idea.

'No,' Nell answered; 'I did not. As he does not care to say where he was, I shall not tell you any more,' she went on with a

little smile of compassion for Ralph's baffled curiosity, 'but you may believe me that there is nothing in his refusal to tell at all to his discredit.' Nell's face had regained its ordinary colouring and composure. 'And so,' she went on, 'you will know what to say if you hear that remark again.'

'I'm—I'm *quite* satisfied, *quite*,' repeated Ralph slowly, while his black eyes searched Nell's composed face keenly; 'but—I think I wouldn't mention that again if I were you. As you say, perhaps the fellow has his reasons for not wishing it to be known, and perhaps it isn't quite fair of you to insist upon telling.'

'But I have not told you anything except that I know—just to convince you that there is nothing in it,' answered Nell eagerly.

A very curious expression crossed Ralph's face. 'That is enough, as far as I am concerned, but—but promise me not to tell any

one else, please promise me, Miss Eveleigh,' entreated Ralph anxiously.

'I can't promise such a thing. If other people think as you thought before I told you, I may have to tell it whether Angus Gray likes it or not.'

'Whether *he* likes it! What does that matter?' exclaimed Ralph in his vexation.

'I thought it was the great matter?' Nell answered, opening her eyes in wonder.

'Yes, yes, to be sure. I wasn't thinking what I was saying,' replied Ralph hastily; 'but promise me then, at least, that you will not mention it again without telling Mr. Eveleigh about it?' And he scanned her face anxiously.

'Oh, my father knows too, and he will be sure to tell what he knows if the question arises,' Nell answered at once.

'Oh!' said Ralph relieved, 'that would depend—but anyhow don't mention it till you speak to him,' he insisted.

‘You are curiously anxious to keep Angus Gray’s secret, Mr. Curgenwen,’ said Nell, looking at him doubtfully; ‘I *might* fancy that you wished the imputation to rest on him—you insist so much on my not betraying it!’

There was some scorn in her tone, and an expression in her face that stung Ralph into saying bitterly, ‘Let it rest on him. It might be worse for everybody if he was cleared. What harm will it do him? Nothing can be *proved* against him. He is in no danger!’

These were the very words her father had used, or the sense of them, when she appealed to him if nothing could be done to remove the unjust suspicion, and as Nell’s face had flushed then with indignation on hearing them, so it flushed now. She looked resolutely at Ralph, and said with determination,—

‘It shall *not* rest on him if I can help it. If I can prove that he had nothing to do with it I will. As you seem to think that my knowledge of where he was will clear him, everybody shall know that I know!’

Ralph’s anger at her persistent defence of Gray began to get the better of him.

‘I wouldn’t if I were you : you might repent it!’ he said in a threatening voice. Come what might he was determined that this secret meeting of Nell’s with Angus, innocent of all harm, as he was sure by the girl’s manner, it had been, should not come to the knowledge of the people of Liaston, who would, he knew, be sure to judge differently of it and put the worst construction on it possible.

‘Repent it?’ repeated Nell, her eyes meeting his with indignant questioning, ‘Why, pray?’

‘Why!’ began Ralph, ‘because—because——’ but he stopped and could not finish his sentence. He could not look into the girl’s pure, proud face and tell her that for her own sake she might repent it. But his determination to seal her lips brought him to take a means of so doing that he had never imagined he could have the cruelty or the folly to take.

‘Because——’ he said, after what could only seem to Nell a very natural hesitation, ‘because if this unjust suspicion, which being entirely without foundation will die of its own weakness, is *proved* to be false, a reaction in favour of Gray will set in, and in all probability the people will seek to lay the blame of which they acquit him on some other, perhaps on the *real offender*!’

He spoke with intentional significance, and again Nell cast on him that scared glance, and again her face grew pale.

‘The “real offender”’ she repeated in a frightened whisper, ‘then you — you — believe——’ her lips refused to utter the question, but her eyes devoured his face for the answer. The agony of doubt in them caused Ralph to hesitate; but an idea born of the coming misery he read in those eyes came suddenly to crush the good impulse, and tempt him to make use of the advantage he thought he might gain by her fear.

‘I think, as I said before, that the people are justified in looking on this disappearance of Mutter as a mysterious business, but I don’t for a moment suspect that any *intentional* wrong has been done to the man, but I confess it seems to me possible that he may *accidentally* have come to grief *not* by his own fault!’

‘And you thought that Angus Gray might *accidentally* have done the wrong in that space of time he has left unaccounted for,

and yet have kept silence?' asked Nell with scorn.

'That was certainly one conjecture that occurred to me. But you have proved that to be impossible. I had *two* theories, one quite unconnected with Gray.'

'You think as Moore says the people think, that Mutter was never near the cliff and that my father imagined he heard a cry and saw a man close to the edge of it!' said Nell with eager assertion.

'On the contrary, I think the man Mr. Eveleigh saw *was* Mutter, and that he *did* fall over,' said Ralph in a grave voice full of meaning, but avoiding Nell's eyes as he spoke.

'Then I cannot understand your theory,' answered the girl firmly, after a scarcely perceptible pause.

Ralph raised his eyes quickly to her face. It was pale and resolute, and she met his glance without wincing, but there was still

that scared look in her eyes, that she in vain strove to hide.

‘I think,’ he said slowly, turning his cruel black eyes away from her again, ‘I think there *may* have been a quarrel.’

‘There was only *one* man, how could one man quarrel?’ asked Nell quickly.

‘There were two men—Mutter—and—your father,’ said Ralph hesitatingly.

‘Are you suggesting that *my* father could possibly have a cause of quarrel with Joe Mutter, a coast-guard?’ said Nell with a quiet dignity that was by no means assumed, so certain was she that this was impossible.

‘I think it not unlikely that he might have a cause of quarrel with—*a* coastguard, and that he might have mistaken Mutter for another man,’ retorted Ralph savagely; and even as he spoke, conviction rushed to chill the poor child’s heart’s blood. A quarrel! this then was the meaning of that strange

scene at the flag-staff. That Gray and her father might have a cause of quarrel unknown to her had even then occurred to her. And in a moment of time all the awful consequences that might possibly have arisen out of the meeting of two men who were at enmity on a dark night in such a dangerous lonely place came to Nell's mind. But she stood bravely to her point.

'I think it most improbable that such a thing could occur, and you know, Mr. Curgenwen, my father told the men at the coast-guard station all the story as he knew it.'

'I know he told—a story to the men! And I consider he had a perfect right to keep back what he chose. No man is called upon to criminate himself.'

'What do you say, Mr. Curgenwen? *criminate himself*! Keep back a part of a story! It seems to me that you forget that you are speaking to me of my father!' said Nell;

and so haughtily she spoke, so well she assumed in the agony of the moment a serene belief in her father's high-mindedness, so honest was the scorn that looked out of her clear eyes at the man who could come to a daughter and suggest to her suspicions of her father, that Ralph was baffled by her apparent want of comprehension of his meaning, and angered past bearing by the contemptuous tone and glance.

‘I do *not* forget it. I tell you this only to convince you that you may repent it if you come with your private knowledge of Angus Gray's movements to avert suspicion from him to your father. And remember, Miss Eveleigh, suspicion in the mind of a *friend*, one who is interested in keeping silence, is one thing—suspicion in the mind of an enemy is another thing!’

‘And *you*—you are a *friend*, I suppose! It is an act of friendship to—to—to——’

Nell had risen up as she began to speak,

pale as death, and her eyes flashing with scorn; but a sudden shuddering seized her, she could not speak the words that expressed her dread and horror, and she sat down again, and hid her face in her hands with a despairing gesture. There was something so youthful, almost childish, in her attitude, which yet was so suggestive of sorrow and utter momentary helplessness, that Ralph was touched by it into tenderness.

‘Yes, Nell; yes, I *am* a friend, a true friend. You can trust me always,’ he said gently, and his rich deep tones were lovely in their tender accents, his dark eyes gleamed with passion, and all his dark face was softened and beautified by the love that rose more strongly in his heart now that Nell’s fears had conquered her scorn and pride, and she sat shivering like a frightened child before some awful approaching danger. He sat down by her on the sofa, and attempted to take her

hands away from her face, and something to his surprise she made no resistance, but seeming scarcely conscious of his action she raised her white tearless face, and drew herself up, looking down on him as he stooped a little, holding her hands.

‘I can—trust—you,’ she said slowly, while her eyes scanned his passionate face, ‘*till I make you my enemy*, Mr. Curgenwen!’

‘But that you will never do, Nell, my Nell, for you *know* how I love you!’ and Ralph lifted the hands he held to his lips and covered them with kisses, before Nell could snatch them away. But in another moment she had done so, and had started to her feet.

‘How dare you do it! How dare you love me!’ she said, all in a blaze of sudden anger; and in her disgust at the loathed kisses with which he had polluted her hands, she rubbed them vehemently with her pocket-handkerchief, with a childish gesture of in-

tensest disdain. 'Love me, do you?' she went on, passionately. 'And you try to kill me with your false, your wicked suspicions! Love me! *You!* I hate you, I loathe you, I despise you, I—I——'

Ralph rose also, and stood facing her, every atom of love dying for the moment out of his heart as he looked at her angry, scornful face, the lines of his own hardening as he listened to her words of contempt, and a determination to conquer her for the offence to his vanity of this, his first unsuccessful wooing, took possession of him.

'Then you *wish* me to be an enemy?' he said coldly. 'You wish me to understand that no *friendship* for you, since you will not even hear the name of *love*, and since you "hate me, you loathe me, you despise me"—' and as he repeated the odious words Ralph's eyes glittered with a revengeful light, and an angry red mounted to his forehead—'that

no feeling of any sort, in fact, need tie my tongue if I choose to lift the suspicion of an evil deed from the wrong man, and fasten it on the right man. Am I to understand all this, Miss Eveleigh ?'

As he spoke, the vehement anger, the passion, and the scorn, passed out of Nell's young face. Her arms dropped, and her hands clasped together in front of her ; she stood motionless staring at Ralph, with a look as if she were turning to stone, so fixed and rigid were the perfect features of her white face.

"There would still be some feeling of honour, surely ?' she said, in a strange quiet voice, when he ceased speaking.

'Honour! to let the innocent suffer for the guilty. Such honour as your father shows!' Ralph answered, with a sneer.

'You said,' said Nell, while a desperate hunted look came into her eyes, and she did

not even attempt to refute his sneer, 'that he, that Gray would only suffer for a time, that it was impossible to prove—that there was no *danger*! You said so,' she repeated, still in the same quiet voice.

'Yes, I said so; it is true,' answered Ralph, sullenly.

There was a pause of a second or two, during which time many thoughts crowded into the girl's brain. At last she said, raising her head which had drooped low on her breast while she was thinking, 'Then if I—if I—did *not* hate you?'

Nell asked her question in a whisper, and involuntarily she raised her clasped hands towards Ralph, and lifted her miserable eyes to his with such pathetic childlike entreaty, that for the second time his anger was melted and his heart softened to her, and such conscience as he had smote him hard. He came close to the girl, and put his own hands round hers, and pressed them together.

‘Darling,’ he said, with a sudden return of tenderness, ‘I knew you could not *hate* me, that it was only because I frightened you. And *you* know that I was only speaking as I did, because for the moment you put me in a rage with your pretended scorn! A man doesn’t like to hear the girl he loves say she “loathes him,” even in fun. You know that, don’t you, my Nell?’

‘Yes; I *know*,’ Nell said, a shiver passing over her, and a longing seizing her to say the words again that had so angered him. But she resolutely controlled all sign of her disgust, and stood steadily with his hated hands clasping hers, and met the re-kindled passion in his eyes without shrinking. ‘For their sakes! For their sakes!’ her heart repeated low to itself; and to Ralph Curgenwen her extreme pallor seemed only a natural consequence of the trying occasion. Already her scorn seemed to him a mere passing girl-

ish ebullition of surprised emotion and agitation at the first words of love she had ever heard, and he promised to himself that he would magnanimously forget it.

‘And you will love me, dearest, now that you have given me the right to win your love?’ he said, softly and tenderly.

Nell's lips pressed themselves firmly together, and for a moment she hesitated. But she could not bring herself to utter the lie that would please him. ‘I will—marry you, if you wish it,’ was all the response she could make; and in spite of herself her voice was hard, and a look came into her grey eyes that almost frightened Ralph into drawing back, even now. But his pride was engaged in the struggle for victory over this child who did not love him, and he said to himself that it would be very odd if he did not succeed in eventually winning her heart.

‘*If* I wish it!’ he echoed reproachfully,

throwing as much tenderness as was possible for him to feel or assume into his voice and eyes. 'Nell, you *must* have known that I have "wished" it for weeks now.'

'No,' Nell answered; 'I never thought about it. My father—— Will you go now, Mr. Curgenwen, and let me think about it all,' and she made a movement to release her hands. Ralph let them go, but before she could step back he put his arms round her, and drawing her close to him, kissed her. Nell made no resistance outwardly, but involuntarily she clenched the hand that hung down by her side, and a passionate hate brought the rebellious blood to her cheeks, and dyed them with a colour that Ralph mistook for girlish blushes. He looked at her complacently and again kissed the burning cheek, before he let her go. She bore it without flinching, till his last words were said. She even went with him to the door, and stood at it till he had finally vanished

down the steps. Then she flew upstairs to her own room, and hastily filling a basin with water, plunged her face and hands into it, rubbing hard the cheek his lips had touched, while tears of shame, and rage, and despair—tears such as Nell had never thought to shed—poured from her eyes to help to wash away the stain. ‘I hate him, I *loathe* him, I despise him,’ she murmured to herself, passionately; ‘but for their sakes, for their sakes!’ And poor Nell, desisting from the vain endeavour to delude herself that she could by any water-washings obliterate the memory of the touch of the man’s loathed lips on her cheeks, gave herself up to the misery of the moment and the reaction of the strain she had put on herself during their interview, and sobbed, with the heart-breaking vehemence of one whose tears are rare, over the degradation of the sacrifice her love and duty had seemed to require of her.

CHAPTER XLV.

A PROMISE.

EVEN Ralph was rather ashamed of himself when he thought over the victory he had achieved. He knew that he had never had the smallest intention of denouncing Mr. Eveleigh, for how could he tell but that if an enquiry were ordered some mischance might not bring to light his own concern in the matter? He had never been quite easy in his mind on that score since his interview with Millar, for he could not but suspect that Angus Gray had some reason for his strange behaviour towards Mr. Eveleigh. It had certainly been in Ralph's mind that he might find his own knowledge, accompanied by a

judicious and delicate threat, useful in his interview with Mr. Eveleigh if he should prove difficult to deal with. But he had never contemplated descending to threaten a girl with the troubles of her father, and now he was uneasily conscious that most people, *if they knew*, would consider that he had done a mean and ungentlemanly action. The very emptiness of his threats seemed to make them appear the more despicable, used as they had been for the mere object of frightening a very young and ignorant girl into promising to marry him. Altogether miserable as he had made Nell, Ralph Curgenwen left her at first by no means much happier than she was in the engagement he had entered into. Now that he was actually engaged he began to think he had been a fool to barter his dearly-loved liberty for the sake of a scornful, proud girl who would not even pretend that she cared for him, and whom it would

be a difficult, perhaps impossible, matter to teach to adore him as he certainly wished his wife should do. However, Nell would herself take very good care that nobody should ever guess at the manner of her wooing, *and if nobody knew*, what did it matter? 'All is fair in love and war,' Ralph again said to himself, and his sanguine temperament eventually induced him to make the best of the situation. After all, girls were very strange creatures, and perhaps Nell had some liking for him. And a complacent smile, as he thought of her blushes, drove away the frown that would gather at the recollection of her face as she said she 'loathed' him. This was not the way in which he had planned to win her, but on reflection it simplified matters wonderfully. When Mr. Eveleigh found that Nell was determined to marry him he would make no fuss, even if the true state of things with regard to Tremore were divulged. And

the chances were ten to one that if such should be the case, the father would conquer the lover in Mr. Eveleigh, and Ava would live unwedded till her death, and so all things would settle themselves. A trick of some sort the circumstances of the case had required. Ralph had not intended that Nell should herself be tricked. No, his idea had been to bribe Mr. Eveleigh, who coveted Tremore as Ralph supposed, by the offer of himself *as its owner*, to his daughter; or if that proved a failure as was very unlikely, to coerce him by hints at the scene he had witnessed on the cliff. Nell would have obeyed her father and would in all probability have grown to love himself by the time the settlements had to be made, and it would then be too late to draw back, any proposals, but those Mr. Eveleigh intended, as Ralph thought, to lay at Ava's feet. And then—well, he was sorry for Ava, but it could not be helped, and

he would make it up to her by being kinder than ever to her. These same ends had now been achieved by the means he had at least the grace to be ashamed of ; and all things considered, he thought, as he was sure of Nell, he would make himself sure of Tremore, also by making a clean breast of his position with regard to it. ' After all was not this the most honourable and straightforward course ? ' said Ralph to himself, holding his head up, and trying to believe in his own high-mindedness. Poor Ava ! but it could not be helped. He would not say any more to her about it. Matters should be allowed to settle themselves somehow ; and he would not interfere one way or other, he would simply tell the truth to Mr. Eveleigh.

Meanwhile Nell had bravely dried her tears, and while they had washed away all the old happy-hearted unconsciousness of her youth for ever, it was not all misery that was

left to her. An exalted satisfaction in having proved to herself that she was willing and ready to take up the burden of a life of continual endurance of all that was most hateful to her for the sake of the safety and happiness of her father took the place of the first horror and disgust with which she found herself pledged to marry Mr. Curgenwen, and nerved her to the unpleasant task of announcing that fact to Mr. Eveleigh.

She went to him when she was wound up to a pitch of intensest love and pity, and self-sacrifice, bent upon making her act of devotion complete by concealing from him that it was one. It was true, as Nell had told Mr. Curgenwen, that Mr. Eveleigh seemed to her to be ill, and equally true, as he said himself, that there was nothing the matter with him. But trouble had worn and aged him, and Nell could not understand, unless he were ill, why he should sit for hours by the fire in his own

room doing nothing at all but staring into the glaring coals as if he were seeking there for the solution of problems that harassed him, and doubts that oppressed him. She had been so struck with his idleness and gloom on the day that Ralph called at the cottage that she had instantly made up her mind that his weariness should not be added to by the 'business' of so objectionable a visitor as she was well aware Ralph Curgenwen would be to him. Hours had passed since she had looked into the study with pity and anxiety for the bodily or mental worry that had so changed her father; and when she came back to him guessing at, nay, certain of the truth, every nerve in her body thrilled with sorrow and deeper compassionating love to find him still sitting there communing with his grief, and wrapt in dreariest melancholy. It simplified the hardness of her task to realise that something must be

done to rouse him out of such despondency. Her entire belief in her father's goodness and honour saved her from the misery of personal mistrust. She was afraid for her father ; afraid, that is, of the consequences to him of the construction that the world, represented by Ralph Curgenwen and the suspicions of Liaston, might put on his share in the disappearance of Mutter ; and she grieved with and deeply pitied him for the involuntary fault, whatever it might be, that had caused him to believe himself responsible for the man's death. But of all *intention* of wrong the girl felt secure that her father was innocent. It was all some horrible mistake ; but the more she thought of it the more mystified she became. For while the conviction that her father had cause of quarrel with Gray was brought home to her distinctly by Ralph's insinuations, she could not imagine what that cause might be. Mingling with all this love

and pity and wonder, and with her determination to shield and protect her father, was an undefined dissatisfaction that Nell scarcely confessed to herself. The very suggestion, even from Ralph Curgenwen's lips, that Mr. Eveleigh had told a part only, or perhaps a pure invention, of the story of Joe Mutter's fall was hateful to her. And while she said to herself that only the strongest necessity for concealment could have induced *her* father to screen himself behind a lie, she was uneasily conscious that it was within the bounds of possibility that he had done so. She felt forced to believe both Ralph and Mr. Eveleigh when they assured her that Angus Gray was in no *danger* from the suspicions that were making his life a burden to him, and she had not hesitated to say to herself that if that were so, then she must let him bear the burden for her father's sake ; and yet—she would not admit to herself that there was

dishonour in Mr. Eveleigh's present course of action; but would not the other alternative, the open confession, the clear truth have been *more* honourable? And would not truth, said Nell to herself in her youthful ignorance, in the end prevail and scatter off the mists of doubt and suspicion that hung over them? Would not the truth save her from Ralph Curgwen?

It was with all these conflicting emotions surging over her that Nell stood a moment and gazed at her father before he noticed her presence in the room. When he did so, he roused himself with a visible effort.

'Come and talk to me, Nell,' he said, holding out his hand to her; 'it seems to me we have not so many talks as we used to have, little one, eh?' he added, stroking her cheek as she knelt down by him on the rug.

'No. Everything is different!' Nell answered, momentarily overpowered by the

dejection of his tone and look ; and the tears started to her eyes as she spoke. He did not contradict her, and the sadness of the sigh that escaped him cut her to the heart. With a gulp she swallowed her tears, and determined to rouse him at all costs, dashed straight into her subject.

‘Mr. Curgenwen has been here, papa. He wished to see you.’

‘And you said I was “not at home.” Good child!—Cad! snob! Really, Nell, I am beginning to hate him almost as much as you do!’ and Mr. Eveleigh laughed with something of his old manner, and a little look of energy came into his whole person, as if hate were inspiring life into him.

‘Oh, hush, father, dear!’ said Nell, with a shudder that she vainly strove to hide. ‘I must not hate him!’—and then, with a scarcely perceptible pause, and a very perceptible heightening of colour, she added,

firmly, but with a strange almost savage abruptness—‘for I have promised to marry him.’

Mr. Eveleigh was roused as thoroughly as Nell could possibly desire at last. He grasped his daughter’s arm with a passionate gesture, and almost shook it. ‘I don’t like jokes on such subjects, Nell,’ he said, with the gravest displeasure.

‘A joke! Do you think it is a joke?’ exclaimed Nell, with an odd laugh; and she put her hand suddenly to her throat as if she were choking, and gasped as if for breath.

The colour rose slowly to Mr. Eveleigh’s face, and rested there in two pink spots on each cheek, and a flame of anger came into his pale eyes. ‘You meant to say, Nell, that Mr. Curgenwen has *asked* you to marry him?’

‘And I have promised to marry him. Why are you so astonished? You asked

me, not very long ago, if Tremore did not tempt me,' said Nell, with sudden inspiration and quick resolution; 'I told you "No" then. I have changed my mind now.' As she spoke she grew calmer, and strove against her inward shuddering bravely.

'And so, for the sake of Tremore, *my* daughter is willing to marry *Ralph Curgenwen*!' said Mr. Eveleigh, after a pause; and it is scarcely possible to convey the depth and height of scorn his eyes and lips and voice expressed as he uttered the hated name.

A sympathetic gleam of contempt came into Nell's face, but she only said quietly, 'Why not, papa? Mr. Curgenwen is handsome, and rich, and not very old, and very good-natured, and kind to his sister; and——'

'Commonplace and coarse-minded, little, mean, without an idea in his head, a cad, a

thorough cad . . . But it is no matter. Even if you tell me you love him, *my* daughter shall never marry Mr. Curgenwen of Tremore!' and Mr. Eveleigh's delicate face took on a look of the sternest and hardest determination, and his eyes rested on Nell's face with quiet searching enquiry.

'Love him!' echoed Nell, in her own honest voice, and with a scorn as deep as any her father had expressed, forgetting her *rôle* in the momentary indignation the suggestion called forth.

'I knew you could not love him, and therefore I have no scruple, Nell. This shall not be,' he said, determinedly.

Then Nell was aware of the mistake she had made. 'Love is not necessary,' she began, colouring violently. 'I——'

'Respect the man, you would say,' interposed her father, with a sneer. Then suddenly he bent towards the girl, and, putting

one arm round her, he turned her face to him with the other hand, and looking into it with an eager anxiety, he said, 'Nell, my honest Nell, will you tell me that you *respect* this man?'

In vain poor Nell tried first to turn her head away, and, finding that impossible, to look indignant at the question. But she was constrained to answer it truly at last. 'No,' she said, slowly, 'I cannot tell you that.'

'And you have said you do not love him. Then it is a purely mercenary motive that influences you, my Nell? You want Tre-more, and his riches? That is it, I suppose?' questioned her father gravely.

A deeper flush burned on Nell's cheeks, and she cast down her eyes and answered in a low humble voice of shame at her lie, 'I suppose it is that—a purely mercenary motive.'

Mr. Eveleigh looked at the downcast

face with a faint smile in his eyes. Then he said, gently, 'Nell, my darling, seventeen years is not a long life, but it is long enough to show, even to a person of such poor perception as you give your father the credit of being, something of the character. *You don't* want Tremore, my Nell, nor the man, nor his riches. Can you not trust me entirely, dear? *What* does this mean?'

'It means—it means—just that I *must* marry him. I *must*—don't try to hinder me, don't for God's sake!' exclaimed Nell, with passionate entreaty, and then looking into her father's face, and meeting there a something that she had never seen in it before of settled purpose, and of determination to oppose her, a fear that he would render her sacrifice useless through ignorance seized her, and she added, in a scarcely audible whisper, hiding her eyes on his shoulder that

she might not see the effect of her words,
'for *he knows, he knows!*'

'Knows!' repeated her father, bewildered—for his thoughts had strayed entirely from his late preoccupations—'knows what?'

'About . . . Mutter!' whispered Nell, with dry lips that could scarcely utter the name, and a beating of her heart that nearly suffocated her. She felt the start of horror and astonishment with which Mr. Eveleigh heard her answer, but she did not look up at him to see the gradual dying out of all colour from his face, though she knew by instinct how he looked, and how in the first moment he shrank away from her by the falling of the arm that held her to his side. She clung a little closer to him, and after a second or two she put up one arm and clasped it round his neck, and, turning her face upwards, kissed him with trembling lips, and whis-

pered, softly, 'And so we must not make an enemy of him, must we?'

The most heartfelt spoken sympathy could not so well have conveyed Nell's love and trust as her simple caress; and no words more fitly chosen could have had a better effect in rousing all the latent courage and honour of Mr. Eveleigh's nature. The arm that had fallen to his side again clasped his child close to him, as the fatherly instinct of protection awoke at her words. He raised his head, and the shrinking look passed from his face, as he said, with a certain pride in his accents, 'My little girl has not then misjudged her father? She believes that no wilful wrong——'

'Oh! hush, papa! How could I believe that? I *know* it is some horrible mistake,' Nell asserted vehemently.

'No, Nell, no mistake. Don't deceive yourself. Since you know so much, you must

know all ;' and, with a strange lightening of the burden of trouble he had borne alone since the fatal night when for some hours of despair he had called himself a murderer, Mr. Eveleigh told Nell all the story, beginning simply by saying that Mr. Curgenwen had, by what he knew now to be untrue statements, so roused his anger against Angus Gray that he had not been able to refrain from striking the man when he was, as he then thought, met by him with a lie in his mouth. Nell listened eagerly but quietly ; and when he had finished she did not speak at once. Then she said, ' You are *sure* he fell over, papa ? '

' Sure ! ' exclaimed Mr. Eveleigh, with a shiver of pain contracting his features, ' shall I ever forget it ? '

' Then Mr. Curgenwen must have seen him fall too, or how could he be so sure as he is ? And oh, father darling ! you *must*

not hinder me, you *must* not make me break my promise to him, for he will say, he will say——’

Nell’s voice died away into a silence of horror and fear, and she lifted her eyes to her father’s face with terror dilating them. He looked down at her and tried to smile, but it was a poor attempt. Nevertheless, in all the anxiety his face expressed a growing purpose mingled, and the look of dread was gone. With the certainty that Nell believed in him, trusted him, and did not shrink from him, Mr. Eveleigh felt the worst of his grief was past.

‘He will say . . . that I pushed the man over. Is not that it, Nell? And I am to let you sacrifice yourself to secure his silence?’

‘Oh, papa! and I meant that you should never know why. I meant you to think I *wished* to marry him! And I *do* wish it,

I do. It must be. You can see it must be!’ exclaimed Nell, in great distress.

‘Let me quite understand,’ Mr. Eveleigh continued, taking no notice of her assertions; ‘this man you ask me to marry you to, he has *threatened* you; *you*, a girl, a child, with what? Tell me exactly, Nell.’

‘Not threatened; no, he did not *say* what he would do, but I guessed. And, oh, papa, why could I not keep it from you?’ repeated Nell, vexed to the depths of her heart at her own mistake.

‘Because, Nell,’ said Mr. Eveleigh, and this time he smiled a real smile, ‘you are only a little girl after all, and unused to deceiving your father, my pet, even for his own good. But tell me what he said.’

‘That he—*loved* me,’ said Nell, with involuntary scorn; ‘and when I said I *loathed* him——’

‘Good child! that’s my darling Nell!’

interposed Mr. Eveleigh, while a gleam of satisfaction came into his eyes.

‘He said then I wished him to be an enemy, and his tongue need not be tied if he chose to lift the suspicion of—of an evil deed from the wrong man, and fasten it on the right man. And *how* could I bear to think that you . . . Papa, I *must* marry him, I *must* ! I have promised, and I—I—I even let him kiss me !’ and the girl’s cheeks flamed, and her eyes actually blazed with indignation as she recalled the degradation she had suffered.

‘How dare you, Nell ! how dare you ! *Let him kiss you !*’ and Mr. Eveleigh almost shook her in his wrath.

‘Yes,’ said Nell, sympathising completely, and forgetting her point again ; ‘it was dreadful, *dreadful* ! I hated him worse than ever ! But I bore it—I could bear it again

for your sake, dear father !' she added, her eyes filling with tender tears.

'God forbid !' exclaimed Mr. Eveleigh hastily, snatching her close to him. 'You shall never see the wretch again. I command you never to speak to him again.'

'I have *promised*. It must be,' repeated Nell, doggedly. She would save him in spite of himself yet.

'It shall *not* be !' said Mr. Eveleigh determinedly.

'Yes ; for, father dear, I am stronger than you think, I *can* bear it. I will try not to hate him. And you need not fear for Gray either, papa,' she added gravely.

A strange look came into Mr. Eveleigh's face.

'What do you mean, Nell ?' he asked, after a pause.

'That the suspicion of him will pass away. He is in no *danger*. Mr. Curgenwen said

he was in no danger, and you said so too, papa. It is true, is it not ?'

There was almost an entreaty in the tone of the question that he would repeat the assurance of Gray's safety, and a doubtful anxiety in her eyes that gave her father much to think of.

'Supposing, Nell, that Gray should be accused ?' The girl started visibly, and turned very pale.

'I said, *supposing* that it should be so ; would you still wish to marry Mr. Curgenwen to bribe him to silence ?'

Nell looked at her father, and tried in vain to read his thoughts. Could it be that he also would *then* keep silence ? The idea was horrible to her.

'You *said* that he was in no *danger*,' she reiterated, in an agony of uncertainty.

'But if he *were*. Would you sacrifice him also on my altar ?' insisted Mr. Eveleigh.

Nell was driven to the last extremity, Which must she choose? To let her father suffer endless ignominy for the truth's sake, or lose faith in his honour for ever, and know him for the meanest of all men, and help him to screen himself behind Gray, to Gray's complete ruin if there *were* danger, as he now implied? The colour went and came in her face, and she wrung her hands together in her distress, but how to answer him she could not determine.

‘Nell, Nell!’ exclaimed her father at last; ‘my poor little girl! What have I done that you should think it even *possible* that I could let you do it? Danger! no, there is no danger to Gray, but even suspicion is hard to bear, and he bears it bravely, Nell, while I—what hard thoughts you have been thinking of me, child!’ and it was not without bitterness that he spoke, knowing that he had kept silence for his daughter's sake far more than for his own.

Nell looked at him for a moment, till the meaning of the reproach in his eyes became clear to her, and then she burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands. She cried so seldom that Mr. Eveleigh was alarmed and distressed beyond measure, and did his utmost to soothe and comfort her by loving words and caresses, and assurances of the emptiness of Mr. Curgenwen's threats, and of his own capability of taking care of both his daughter and himself. And gradually Nell's sobs grew fewer and fewer, till at last she raised her head and said humbly and repentantly,

'I ought to have been *sure*! I ought to have felt that you could not let him suffer for you if there were danger! Forgive me, father dear;' and she held up her face for a kiss of pardon.

'You think a great deal of Gray's "sufferings," child,' he could not refrain from

saying as he gave it ; ‘ if they are as acute as you imagine, I wonder he bears it, danger or no danger. If he guesses at the truth, as he does—as he does,’ repeated Mr. Eveleigh, interrupting himself to think over Gray’s refusal to take his hand.

‘ Would it be like Angus Gray to save himself by “guessing” at the truth ? Do you think he would not bear anything rather than wrongfully accuse another ? ’ exclaimed Nell indignantly.

‘ You forget, Nell, that, in defending him you are denouncing me,’ Mr. Eveleigh remarked quietly, with an odd smile.

‘ Oh, no ! not that, papa, for I *knew*. I *knew* you had some reason, that it could not be only because you were afraid,’ Nell answered hastily. But her father would not let it pass.

‘ I *was* afraid, Nell ; I *am now*, of the consequences,’ he said honestly ; and added,

more to himself than to her, and as if he required to apologise to *himself*—‘For your sake, my darling, for your sake!’

Nell’s face lightened, and a tender smile of perfect trust shone through the tears that still wet her eyes; but it died away quickly as the echo of his fear came back to her. The old anxiety and the look of resolution returned to her, and she answered with earnest simplicity,

‘And for my sake Gray will bear it, and there is *no* danger to him, none; and to us it can only come through Mr. Curgenwen. Father dear, am *I* to bear nothing for your sake? I *must* keep my promise, I *must*,’ and Nell valiantly repressed the shudder that came over her as she returned to the charge, and named the hated name, and remembered her promise and its cause.

‘Do you think, Nell,’ said her father slowly, laying his hand on her head, and

bending to look into her eyes ; ‘ do you think that it would lighten my trouble—or *Gray’s*—to let you sacrifice yourself to the spite of Mr. Curgenwen ? ’

A sudden crimson covered the girl’s face, and she strove to say she was a willing sacrifice, but the words would not come. Mr. Eveleigh smiled slightly.

‘ The spirit indeed is willing, eh, Nell ? Go away now, my darling, and let me think. I may require *some* sacrifice, Nell, but I must think, I must think,’ and taking his hand from her head he sank back again into the depths of his chair, and fixed his eyes intently on the fire. And Nell went away uncertain, anxious, and vexed with the total failure of her attempt to pretend that she of her own will had elected to marry Ralph Curgenwen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GRAY AND MR. EVELEIGH.

ONE of her objects Nell had at least effected, though she was herself scarcely aware of it. She had effectually roused her father out of the dull despair into which remorse and a morbid horror had plunged him. Looking at the course of inaction he had proposed to himself by the light of the expression in his daughter's face when she had seemed for a moment to hesitate to believe him incapable of allowing an innocent man to be seriously accused of a crime in his stead, he began to perceive that it was an unworthy course. And looking also by the help of Nell's trust in himself at the whole matter

from a less morbid and more commonsense point of view, his natural courage revived, and his mind went to work with some zest on the means of circumventing and confounding the machinations of Ralph Curgenwen. The first thing to be done was to find out what was the extent of the knowledge of the real story that the man possessed. It was also imperatively necessary that an immediate and complete stop should be put to his persecution of Nell. All that was left of the day was given by Mr. Eveleigh to these absorbing thoughts, but it was in vain that he taxed himself to explain Ralph's knowledge. He knew that he had parted from him in actual anger and seeming friendship before he met Mutter on that night, but the after events had a little confused his recollection of the exact time and place ; and although he would now have been willing to give Ralph Curgenwen credit for any sneaking action, it did

not occur to him to think that he himself had been watched after he parted from Ralph by the latter. Since he had walked with Nell through the town with the object of making a demonstration in favour of Gray, Mr. Eveleigh had never been out of the house. In vain Nell had tried to persuade him; on one excuse or another he had steadily refused to go anywhere either with her or alone. But now with the lifting of the weight of his fear of losing Nell's love and trust, with returning courage, with the possibility of and necessity for action, came a longing to refresh himself physically by air and exercise; and after the dinner which for almost the first time in her life Nell could not eat, and in which for the first time for many days, her father to her astonishment and satisfaction appeared to take some personal and healthy interest, instead of shutting himself up in his study as he had

done of late, careless of Nell's loneliness, he announced his intention of going out. It was a fine clear night, with plenty of moonlight and no wind, but when Nell asked him if he would not take her with him, he refused. 'I want to think, Nell,' he said gravely, but without the dejection of tone or look that the possible subject of his thoughts naturally suggested to Nell that he must feel, and she let him go without further entreaty, but not without a half superstitious shiver of remembrance of the last evening walk he had taken alone and its fatal consequences. Mechanically he took the turn to the cliff, and his 'thinking' was so deep, or his cigar so engrossing, that it was not till he had passed Farley's farm, that it occurred to him to notice that his feet were leading towards the unlucky spot where he had undergone such a misery *years ago* it seemed to him now, though it was in reality barely weeks. In-

voluntarily he turned sharp round with a shudder and retracing his steps took the steep path to the shore. It was low water, and the sand was dry and hard and the walking easy close by the sea ; and he wandered on aimlessly drinking in strength and courage from the strong fresh air, soothed consciously by the beauty of the night, and gradually becoming happier and more hopeful. Now and then he stopped to look back at the town lying so quiet and peaceful in the moonlight ; at the long low range of cliffs stretching eastward far beyond it, and crowned with touches of cold white light ; at the dark woods that rose high above the town waving their long branches softly over it and round it, rocking all the poor little dwellings in their strong arms to sleep ; and at the long wide path of light on the sea that led up from the shore straight into the infinite depths of the clear starry sky. Once

when he looked back, he saw a boat come suddenly out of the comparative darkness beyond into the flood of moonlight, its white sail gleaming for a moment like a great silver wing, as it swiftly crossed the bright pathway. He watched it till it plunged again into the dark water nearest him, and then he turned again and pursued his way slowly towards the west. About a mile and a half from the town the shore became more rocky and uneven, and the walking difficult and unpleasant; the foreshore was a mass of black rocks covered with sea-weed, and only here and there a short stretch of dry sand was to be found. Choosing a dry rock sufficiently far removed from the dangers of the falling stones of the cliff, that by chance stood at the border of a strip of sand that the sea ran on to, making a miniature bay between two reefs of the black rock, Mr. Eveleigh sat down, and, lighting another cigar, continued the medita-

tions he had been beguiled by the beauty around him into forgetting a little. By degrees they again absorbed him so completely that he did not notice that the boat he had watched behind him had come up nearly opposite the place where he sat. One man only occupied it, and he was quickly taking down the sail so near land that his movements were distinctly visible, when the boat again caught Mr. Eveleigh's attention, and again diverted his thoughts. When he had hauled down the sail the man took the oars, and rowed in shore close to the very place where Mr. Eveleigh sat, and jumping out dragged the boat a little way on the sand between the rocks, and, standing with his back to Mr. Eveleigh, drew himself up to his full height and looked long and keenly east and west over the reefs. Then with a gesture that had something strangely sad and weary in it the man stretched out his arms

and clasped them over his head, and stood motionless with his face towards the sea. Though he was not near enough to distinguish the face as it was turned to him, when the man sprang out of the boat, Mr. Eveleigh recognised Angus Gray in a moment, and his heart began to beat strongly against his ribs. Once again, alone in the moonlight, and this time no counterfeit but the real Angus stood before him ; but where were the anger, and violence, and passion that the sight of Gray had roused in him then ? What was this feeling that now rose up at the sight and quickened Mr. Eveleigh's pulses, and made the blood rush unseen to his forehead ? Fear it could scarcely be, for his eyes were wet with something that he brushed hastily away not unlike tears, and his voice was soft and almost tender, when having risen up hastily and gone to him, Mr. Eveleigh stood by Angus' side, and, laying his hand on his

shoulder, said, looking anxiously into the sad face that turned to him in momentary bewilderment,

‘Gray! my poor fellow, it is high time that you and I came to some better understanding—this sort of thing won’t do at all! My mind’s made up, but——this is useless work, Gray, utterly useless. What can you hope to find now? Why do you come here?’ and Mr. Eveleigh’s voice sank almost to a whisper.

With an instinctive movement of aversion Angus freed himself from the other’s touch, and standing apart looked round to make sure they were alone.

‘It’s time that we came to an understanding, as you say, Mr. Eveleigh,’ he answered, his voice involuntarily taking a threatening tone. ‘Why do I come here? you’ll have heard maybe that a man that murders another man can’t keep away from the place

where the deed was done ! And you'll have heard the folks say that I've made away with Mutter, and you'll know best whether that's true, Mr. Eveleigh ! You'll be able to tell me, maybe, what *you* come here for ?' The long pent-up anger and desire for revenge suddenly finding an outlet rang in his voice, and showed in his face and in the clenched hand that moved uneasily by his side.

But Mr. Eveleigh only answered quietly, 'I *have* heard all that, Angus Gray, and I came here to think of the best way to stop their lying tongues. I know of only one way, to give myself up as the cause, the *involuntary* cause, of Mutter's death.'

'Involuntary cause !' repeated Angus incredulously, 'what was to hinder your saying that to begin with, if it's true ?'

'Don't be a fool, Gray !' returned Mr. Eveleigh, dispassionately ; 'if you will think a moment you will see what hindered me. Did

you, or did you not, ask me yourself whether I did not think that poor fellow was you? Did you, or did you not, guess that I struck him thinking he was Angus Gray and not the man he was?’

‘I was sure of it, I was sure of it!’ muttered Gray.

‘Then if you were sure of it, you will also know what there was to hinder me from publishing to all the world that I had cause of quarrel with *you*, Angus Gray? Think a moment, and you will be able to answer me that.’

Even in the pale moonlight it was easy to see the crimson flush that rose to Gray’s face as Mr. Eveleigh’s words brought back to him old Farley’s remonstrances with him on the boasts he was said to have made in Liaston of his friendship with the Eveleighs and of Nell’s liking for him; and it was *her* father, and not the destroyer of his friend

that he addressed when his momentary passion died away. He spoke half apologetically and yet not without dignity, not feigning any ignorance of the other's meaning.

‘How could I think that you would believe that I was a liar and a blackguard, you that ought to have known me better than that by this time, Mr. Eveleigh!’

‘So I ought! so I ought! Gray,’ said Mr. Eveleigh hastily, ‘but a man in a passion does not stop to think—come over here where I was sitting, and let me tell you the whole story,’ and he went back to the rock, followed by Gray, whose mind was slowly returning to its balance, and who had regained enough of the self-control that had been shaken by the unexpected meeting with the man who had doubly wronged himself and Mutter, to lead him to listen fairly to what Mr. Eveleigh might have to say for himself. To go over again, and this time without reservation, the

history of that horrible night was a task that tried Mr. Eveleigh's nerve to the utmost, and when he came to the point where Mutter took the false step backwards, and fell over with a great cry of despair, the cry seemed to ring again in his ears, he shuddered and turning his head glanced along the coast towards the fatal spot, started up suddenly and paced up and down the strip of sand in front of them in uncontrollable agitation. A great pity came into Gray's heart as he watched him, and all his anger died away. If forgiveness could do him any good, Mr. Eveleigh had Gray's full and free pardon from that moment. Presently Mr. Eveleigh came back to the rock, and, standing in front of Gray, said hurriedly and as if longing to get it all over, ' And then, Gray, you can guess the rest ; the fear of consequences, the hope that Mutter yet lived, and the impossibility of leaving him to his fate, and the equal impos-

sibility of explaining my rage against you to Millar ; my fear of you and the revenge you might take, for how could I guess that you would behave, as you have done, nobly, Angus Gray, nobly—but you shall suffer for my sake no longer, my mind's made up—the truth shall be told, the truth at all costs——'

'I doubt if you've reckoned them up ; the costs I'm meaning,' interposed Angus, putting from him resolutely the temptation to take Mr. Eveleigh at his word, and let him remove the burden that was weighing down his very life, of undeserved reproach. 'And as for me, now that I know that it was an *accident*, and that you're not *willing* to let the folks believe ill of me, I can bear it well enough. What I *couldn't* bear would be to make—to make—*her* miserable!' said Angus, in a choked voice.

There was a silence of a second or two, and then Mr. Eveleigh said slowly, 'And so

to save—*us* from some sorrow and some ignominy you propose to allow the calumnies against yourself to go uncontradicted ?’

‘Just so,’ Angus answered simply. ‘Am I the first man as has borne to be evil spoken of? If you’ll believe me, Mr. Eveleigh, you’ll just let things alone as they are. It’s nobody’s business but yours and mine that I can see, and if I’m willing——’

Mr. Eveleigh turned quickly away again, and walked rapidly up and down several times before he came back. When he did so all sign of emotion had passed away, and in its stead a look of purpose had settled on his face, and in his voice was the old imperiousness that Angus remembered so well.

‘It can’t be Gray, my mind’s made up; but I thank you all the same, I thank you from my heart for myself and—my daughter. Will you take my hand, Angus Gray, now that you know it was an *accident*?’ and he

held it out boldly, with the assurance of a man who had settled finally all scores with his conscience, and had regained his own self-respect by his determination to do the right. Without any hesitation Angus took it and wrung it hard, saying as he did so, 'Think better of it, sir, take time to think of it, for—for your daughter's sake. It would kill her to think ill of you, and as for what she thinks of a man like me——'

'She knows all about it, Gray, *everything* now, and as to what she thinks of you'—Mr. Eveleigh stopped, hesitated a moment, struggled between pride and gratitude, and finally said gravely, and without the faintest suspicion of irony, 'she could not think too highly of a "man like you," and never for a moment believed a word against you. Good night, and think that to-morrow will see the end of your troubles, if it sees the beginning of mine!' And not giving Angus time to make

another remonstrance, he turned quickly away from him in the direction of Liaston.

Angus, when he was left alone, was half ashamed of the gladness that had suddenly lightened his heart at Mr. Eveleigh's words. 'She never for a moment believed a word against you,' seemed to sound in a thousand lovely melodies to a thousand lovely harmonies in his ears. She believed in him; she trusted him; she respected him; what could he not endure now with that knowledge? Nothing in the situation was actually changed. Mutter was dead, and he himself was still suspected of evil, and yet he mourned no longer, he despaired no longer as one without hope. Had he then not really mourned for his friend? was the good opinion of a girl so much to set against the loss of a friendship such as theirs had been? In vain Angus reasoned with himself and tried to believe he was still perfectly miserable. He

was not miserable, he was glad—and when he was once thoroughly convinced that he was happier he sought in his mind for more natural causes for the relief of his feelings than this seemed to be. Was it not something to have his faith restored in *her* father ; to know that no craven fear for himself, but a watchful care for her honour, had kept him silent ; that now, not even that care interposed to keep him from his purpose of honourable confession, since he had found that his silence was a wrong to another and an innocent man ? Very few words had been spoken between the two men during Mr. Eveleigh's relation of the events of that night with regard to the cause of his anger against Gray. He had heard, Mr. Eveleigh had simply said, words of Gray's repeated, that had angered him past endurance.

‘Stop a moment, sir,’ Angus had interposed, ‘was it Curgenwen of Tremore who

told you *that*?' And when Mr. Eveleigh replied in the affirmative, Angus had asked another question with unconscious reproach and wonder,

'And you believed him against me?'

'Only for the moment, Gray; only for the moment. Remember that always,' Mr. Eveleigh had answered quickly.

And Angus was remembering it now; and remembering, too, with a satisfaction that he could not repress that Mr. Eveleigh had added with entire conviction, '*I thought* then—I have reason to *know* since—that that fellow is the vilest of cads—beneath contempt.'

Was it possible that he could have spoken thus of a son-in-law elect, whatever he might have thought of him? Or was not all the gossip with regard to Miss Eveleigh's engagement to 'the vilest of cads' about as true as the other reports that had spread about the town? Hope rose up in his heart

and called loudly to him that all was not lost because the suspicions of the mean and the slanderous had fallen for a moment like a blight across his life. She believed in him, and now he could bear all: nay, now he *would* bear all, that trouble should not fall on her father. This he must and would avert. He rose to his feet, and looked after the slowly retreating form of Mr. Eveleigh as he followed the windings of the coast on the sand close to the sea—a conspicuous black figure against the moonlit shore. If he pushed off at once, Gray reckoned that he would be at Liaston as soon as Mr. Eveleigh, and could follow him home and remonstrate and convince him of the folly of his proposed course of action; and while he sailed home he could think of the arguments he would use, and Mr. Eveleigh would have had time to cool down a little from the height of pride which had determined him not to be

outdone in generosity by a coast-guard. Angus actually laughed as this true perception of one of the other's determining motives dawned upon him; but the sound of his laugh in this lonely place, where he had come in morbid despair to seek for a sign of the friend he had lost, smote on his ear like a sacrilege, and he blushed with shame and sorrow at his own levity and forgetfulness, and hastily pushing off his boat, took the oars to help the sail to put space between the melancholy place and his own returning hopes and confidence in the better days that something seemed to say to him were dawning at last. As his boat went swiftly towards the harbour, he thought again of Davidson, and the 'light somewhere' that he believed in, and again the words in the book that Nell had lent him came to his mind, and he said them softly to himself: 'The fiend-voices that rave shall dwindle, shall blend, shall

change, shall become first a peace out of pain, then a light, then ——.' He stopped and lifted his face upwards with a glory of love and hope shining in it that was never shed from above by the moon's cold light.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE AMENDE.

So occupied was Gray with his own thoughts that it was not till he was actually close to the harbour at Liaston that he became aware that there was an unusual stir and commotion about the place. Crowds of people were hurrying hither and thither in an excited kind of way : some were standing in knots talking together, but all of them seemed to be waiting for something. Glancing round with a keen, accustomed eye, Gray saw that a strange vessel had entered the place since he left it. It was a French lugger, with three masts, large, roughly built, and rigged with four lug-sails and a jib, the fourth lug as topsail

on the mainmast; but the lights were out, and the sailors seemed to have gone ashore, and the lugger itself seemed too uninteresting and ordinary a little vessel to have all those people to look at it, and yet the greater part of them were standing as near to it as they could get on the pier. As Gray's boat came round into the harbour, a great shout rose from the shore and the pier, hats were pulled off and waved frantically about, cries that sounded like hurrahs rose in the stillness of the night, and the rushing hither and thither stopped, and a quick and general movement began towards the place where Gray's boat seemed likely to land. Angus was brave, with a higher courage than most men possess, yet for a moment his heart stood still and a sudden collapse came to his hopes and dreams of happiness. What were all these people waiting there for him? A man suspected by the greater number of them of a

horrible crime ? Were they there as friends or enemies ? That they were enemies who had got hold of something that they considered a tangible proof of his guilt, and had banded together to deliver him up to the justice of the law, was naturally Gray's first fear ; but as he came nearer he was utterly bewildered. Enemies would not wave their caps and scream ' Hurrah for Gray ! ' till they were hoarse ; enemies would not shout to him to ' Come on, old boy. We're all on us awaitin' to see the play ; ' enemies would not jostle each other for the honour of being the first to seize the boat, and drag it up close, and hurrah still louder and louder as he stepped out amongst them, and surround him to shake his hands off, and vie with each other in reiterating that '*they* allays knowed it were a lie, and *they* hoped as he would never think as *they* had believed a word agen him.' Before he had time to recover

from his surprise, two of the older men of the coast-guard took each one an arm, and marched him silently out of the crowd. Pale with sympathetic emotion, and paler still by the moonlight, Angus turned first to one and then the other for explanation of this extraordinary behaviour, but they only told him to 'Hold his tongue, and keep his eyes open, and come along quiet,' enforcing their recommendation by a more determined grip of his arm, and a quicker movement in the direction of the storehouses, their faces gleaming with a kindly humour that made the friendliness of their intention evident enough. Practical jokes were very frequent amongst them, and Gray resigned himself to being the victim of one of them, but with a flutter of unusual expectation agitating him with a feeling that was not a presentiment of evil. His hat had been knocked off in the crush of men he had landed amongst, and he was

marched along the pier bareheaded between his two mates before a crowd of sailors and townsmen, who followed fast in a silence of expectation curiously contrasting with the noise they had made when he landed. He looked very much like a prisoner, and very unlike a criminal with his noble head uncovered and the open, frank expression of his beautiful face plainly to be seen in the clear moonlight. Just as they got to the point where the pier meets the land, Mr. Eveleigh, roused by the unusual commotion he had observed on the pier, was hurrying up from the shore, and seeing Angus marched along between two men and followed by a crowd, he instantly came to the conclusion that he had been arrested, and without a second thought he had dashed up in front of them all, and bringing the procession to a full stop by his movement, he laid hold of Angus, and turning with an air of command

that he knew well how to assume, he said, 'You will let Angus Gray go free, if you please. I will be answerable for him. He is not likely to try to escape. Unhand him directly.'

A roar of laughter from the crowd saluted this speech, followed by a loud 'Hurrah for old Eveleigh!' and a pressing forward that forced on the march.

'It's some joke of the men's,' said Angus hastily to Mr. Eveleigh, while one of his guards unceremoniously pulled 'old Eveleigh' on one side, and took hold of him by the other arm, simply remarking, 'It's a joke as nobody has a better right nor you to see, sir; so we'll take you along,' — and so hastened on. The point they appeared to be making for was the biggest boathouse, round the door of which all the rest of the coast-guards were congregated, and amongst them oddly enough at this time of the night

—for it was past ten o'clock—were all the women of the station. They were close up before his mates loosed their hold of Angus, and as they did so the little group of men and women at the boathouse door parted, and a man stepped forward. His arm was in a sling, and his dress was that of a French sailor ; but his curly head was bare, and there was no mistaking the smile that lighted up his thin face. For one brief instant Angus stood motionless with astonishment, the next his hand was clasped in Joe Mutter's, and the other was laid gently on the shoulder of the wounded arm, and a great joy filled his heart as he looked eagerly into his friend's face and made sure it was no spirit, whispering softly, as if still unconvinced even now, 'Joe ! Joe ! Is it *you*, Joe ? It *can't* be you, Joe !'

'It's me all the same, and I wish I'd been here sooner, from all I hear,' said Joe, his

smile changing to a frown as he looked at the crowd, and suddenly disengaging his hand from Gray's, raised it and shook his clenched fist at it, calling out in a voice that could be heard by every man in it, 'Wait till I've two fists again, and see if I don't wear 'em out on your heads, you blokes!' a speech which, far from exciting the wrath it ought to have done, elicited nothing but laughter and applause, and vociferated assurances from each individual in the crowd that for his part *he* never had a doubt of Gray, and his head needed no punching on that score; and then there rose shouts in which enthusiasm and repentance mingled for Gray. 'Hurrah for Gray! Three cheers for Gray!' till the noise of the shouting reached the town and excited the inhabitants, who were retiring peacefully to their beds, to come out to see the cause; but the coast-guards quickly took their recovered possession home to the station, eager

to hear the repetition of his story, which of course must be retold to Gray. So the people of the town had to be content for that night with meeting the lucky individuals who had seen the lost man with their own eyes, and could vouch for his identity, and who were one and all eager to assure everybody that *they* had guessed it all along 'as Joe Mutter would turn up yet, and had never—*no, never*—had an ill thought o' Gray in the matter.'

In the confusion Mr. Eveleigh was forgotten. Quicker than Gray, he had in the space between the pier and the boathouse had a dim suspicion of something extraordinary that was going to happen, for no sooner had the coast-guard said that he had a right to see the 'joke' than he had half-divined it, and his heart had begun to beat fast, and his breath to come in laboured gasps, which the quick march could scarcely account for.

Therefore, when Joe Mutter, the man he had sent to his death, whose cry had haunted him till he had learnt to believe that he should hear it to his dying day, stepped out of the group of men and women and clasped his friend's hand with a real, warm, living clasp, Mr. Eveleigh wanted no one to assure him that he was flesh and not a spirit ; yet he staggered back and caught at the arm of the man nearest him for support. The revulsion of feeling was too great and stunned him for the moment. The man he clutched happened to be Davidson, who, partly understanding and wholly sympathising, led him a little way out of the crowd, and made him sit down on the long bench that stood by the little gate of the path up to the station houses, and seeing that he was not likely to faint or have a fit, did the kindest thing he could have done by leaving him alone and going back to the shouting crowd himself.

As he gradually recovered, Mr. Eveleigh recognised the place. What years of horror and misery he seemed to himself to have passed through since that night when he had staggered against Gray, whom he then believed had died by his fault ! It was over now : the 'black minute' was at an end. How, he did not ask ; but a blessed certainty that the people's shouts meant peace and hope and freedom from carking care came over him, his weary, oppressed heart laid aside its burdens, and sitting apart from and yet identified with the enthusiasm that stirred his fellow-men, Mr. Eveleigh responded to it in a strange way for so proud and self-controlled a man by dropping his head in his hands and bursting into tears of relief that broke the strain of anguish that had for weeks seemed to draw tighter and tighter round his heart. He had hardly time to dash them away before the men came up with

Gray and Mutter in their midst, and rising up he advanced a few steps to meet them and calling to Mutter by his name, held out his hand, but could not utter a word. Joe seemed to take it all in : the man's scarcely concealed emotion, the repentance, the bitter self-reproach—that was past now—the joy that was too deep for utterance, that the burden of secret wrong had fallen from him ; and knowing better than any man what Mr. Eveleigh must have suffered from the consequences of their encounter on the cliff, Joe clasped his hand with a willing forgiveness, saying, so that all might hear, ‘ It was *altogether* a mistake you see, sir ; but it's worth being killed a'most to come back to life and find so many friends glad to see you again. And *you* too, sir ; I take it kind of you,—and they've been telling me how you got 'em all up to look after me,’ added Joe, giving Mr. Eveleigh's hand a final and hearty shake.

‘You’ll come in, sir, an’ hear Joe’s tale? It’s as queer a tale as ever I hear, supposin’ as it’s true, eh, Joe, lad? You was allays a fellow for drawing the long bow, *you* was, Joe,’ said one of the elder men.

But Mr. Eveleigh had borne as much as he could bear that night, and could not trust himself in his present agitation of mind to listen unmoved to the story, and excused himself hastily, and drawing Mutter aside he said in a low voice,

‘Gray will bring you up to the cottage to-morrow, if you will come, and then you can tell me. *You* will not wonder that I cannot come in;’ and without waiting for any answer passed quickly out of the group and hurried home. The great fact that Mutter was alive was everything, and the details of his escape were nothing to Mr. Eveleigh in that moment. He stood still on the steps of the cottage garden, and lifted his head in silent

gratitude when he remembered that he had left his home only two hours ago with a mind made up to suffer the ignominy of confession and all its probable consequences, and was now returning to it saved and free. To whom was he grateful? It would have puzzled Mr. Eveleigh to say; it would have offended his reason to think that he was referring his escape, his new hopes, his returning happiness, to the care of the Unseen Power that his creed, if he could be said to have a creed at all, taught him to regard as perfectly indifferent to the individual happiness or misery of poor humanity. He would have smiled superiorly at Gray's belief that 'Providence takes us in tow,' and yet the attitude of his mind that night was more reverent and grateful than it had been for many and many a day: a vague reverence, a vague gratitude, but none the less

heartfelt. Nell was waiting anxiously for him, and hearing his step, rushed to open the door. Taking her in his arms, he kissed her fervently, and something in his manner, something in his face, made her ask quickly,

‘What is it, papa? Something has happened? Something ——?’

‘Something that will very much surprise and displease Mr. Curgenwen of Tremore, my Nell,’ said Mr. Eveleigh enigmatically, passing before her into the lighted room and shutting the door carefully behind her. She stood looking up at him in wonder.

‘How happy you look! Tell me quickly. It is something good. Oh! make haste;’ and the colour rose to her cheeks.

Then he told her, gently and carefully, the whole history of the two hours since he had left her, for he could not forego the satisfaction to himself of letting her know that he had pro-

mised Gray to take the burden of suspicion off his shoulders and lay it on his own. He thought that he owed it to himself to prove to Nell that a gentleman was after all as honourable as a coast-guard, and that her doubt of her father was a thing she had reason deeply to repent of. When he came to the point where Joe Mutter stepped out to meet Gray, Nell, whose eyes were shining with excitement, and whose cheeks were burning with expectation, rose up and clasped her hands together :

‘I knew it! I knew it! Did I not say so, papa, even at the first that perhaps he was not dead?’

‘Ah! my Nell,’ answered her father, with a smile and a swift return to his ordinary half - cynical manner, ‘you are like the crowd—“We know’d it! We know’d it. It was never one of *we* as believed a word agin Gray.” You should have heard all the very

men who had believed it most shouting their denial of the fact! Would my little girl have been frightened so by that brute Curgenwen if she had known all along that Mutter was alive? Come here, my darling.' And she came at his bidding, and knelt down by him with a happy smile on her face.

'And oh! father, dear! What shall I say to him? How can I go back from my promise?' she asked, only for the pleasure of hearing how she could break it.

'Say? Why, that *I* forbid it, of course. What dutiful daughter would marry a man against her father's wishes? But you know now, Nell, that *it* could never have been: you understand that my mind was quite made up *before* I knew all this?' he asked anxiously.

'It was noble of you, papa. Forgive me!—and yet, no. There is nothing to forgive, for I never *really* doubted you—*never*! How

could I? *My* father let another man suffer for him!’ said Nell proudly.

A faint colour rose up in Mr. Eveleigh’s face at her confidence. Had he wholly justified it? Some vague doubt of himself caused him to say honestly, ‘I *think* it was not possible that I could have been less generous than Gray, and yet, Nell, how generous that man has been! Did I tell you that he knew it all the time, and really believed that Mutter met his death by my hand, and suffered the reproach of it rather than that trouble should fall on—us? I always said that man was a gentleman!’ exclaimed Mr. Eveleigh, feeling that he had made the fullest amende in his power to make by this last admission.

A lovely crimson dyed Nell’s cheek, and a soft light came into her eyes, but she only said, with something of her old way of speaking when she thought she had the best of an

argument, 'You will believe in the people yet, papa.'

'The people!' echoed Mr. Eveleigh, with indignant scorn. 'Don't you see that I am separating Gray from the people? I tell you I am positive that man has good blood in his veins,' he added with conviction.

'So has—Mr. Curgenwen of Tremore!' said Nell, shuddering as she recalled Ralph's cruel black eyes, and pressing closer to her father, as if for protection; then all in a moment she burst into a passion of tears that seemed to shake her inmost soul with a sudden storm of horrible remembrance.

'Hush! my darling. Hush! for God's sake!' entreated her father, his own eyes filling sympathetically. 'Be glad for my sake, my Nell, that it's over at last, this misery.'

'I am; I am,' sobbed Nell, striving to check her agitation; 'but it has all been so wretched for you, and—and everybody.'

‘Thank God it’s over, Nell!’ said Mr. Eveleigh solemnly, with another vague aspiration of gratitude and reverence.

And Nell repeated softly, with a deeper reverence, a more certain gratitude, ‘Thank God!’

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE LAST OF THE SMUGGLERS.

MUTTER'S story took long in the telling that night, interrupted as he was by the constant comments, and reflections, and questions of the men who listened to him. Millar informed him he had nobody to thank but himself for all the trouble he had brought about, seeing that it was his own vanity and self-conceit that was at the bottom of it all. This remark, which was not made ill-naturedly, requires explanation. It seems that Mutter, by his own confession, thought to gain honour and glory by his exchange with Gray the night he was supposed to go to Culve, by the discovery of the evil deeds of two

men whom he had long suspected of eluding the vigilance of the coast-guard, and of indulging in unlawful trade with some French luggers whose appearance had once or twice excited surprise and doubt, but on which nothing contraband had ever been discovered. Smuggling, as of course everybody knows, is pretty nearly stamped out, and is a very profitless business in these days ; but one or two instances of it have been known of late years on the south coast of England and Ireland. The way now resorted to to defeat the coast-guards is to sink the kegs of spirits which are brought off at night in small boats ; or the spirits and tobacco are transhipped from French and Dutch luggers met in the channel by management. It was the former process that Mutter suspected was going on under their very eyes, and with regard to which he had the audacity while telling his story to assert that they ought to be ashamed

of themselves for never getting further than conjecture. Instead of communicating these suspicions to Millar, or, as would have been natural but for their coolness, to Gray, Mutter was minded to settle his doubts alone, and get all the credit of the feat. This he made no secret of in his relation of events, and begged Millar's pardon so frankly that that worthy, who was besides too much delighted at the turn events had taken to be censorious, willingly accorded it, though he could not resist improving the occasion by some words in season on presumption and conceit. At the moment when Mr. Eveleigh came upon Joe he was hovering about the spot he suspected, waiting to see the boat push out from shore ; and as he also expected to come upon an accomplice watching somewhere under the cliff walk, he had provided himself with a lantern for the identification of any man he might find answering to his

suspicion. At first he thought Mr. Eveleigh was his man, but was quick to discover his mistake. A temptation to personate Gray when he found Mr. Eveleigh mistook him for the former had seized him, and had caused the hesitation in his reply that lead Mr. Eveleigh and Ralph Curgenwen to believe his denial to be a lie. And then the struggle had ensued with its unfortunate result. But of all this Mutter made no mention in his narration. He said only that in leaning over to look below he had lost his balance, and had as he subsequently had reason to believe, but of this he could not be sure, fallen at the feet of the very men he was watching for.

The real story was divulged to a few persons long afterwards by one of the chief actors, and may as well be related here. The men Mutter referred to were sitting at the mouth of a hole or cavern on the side of the cliff, about fifty feet from the top. Thick

bushes and fern grew on the ledge just above this hiding place, and effectually concealed it from the sight of any person looking downwards. The men were waiting there till the hour of the coast-guard's walk should pass, when they heard the cry Mutter gave, and suddenly the very man they hoped would soon be well on his way to Culve, fell with a heavy crash close above them. Mutter was completely stunned by his fall ; hence the silence that had horrified Mr. Eveleigh. He fell down amongst the bushes on the ledge, but the night was too dark for Mr. Eveleigh to see where he fell, even if he had looked over quite at the right spot.

The two men below heard Mr. Eveleigh call to Gray by his name with an agony of entreaty that they had carefully abstained from answering, and it was not till they were sure from the complete silence that the place was at last deserted that they ventured to go

to the assistance of Mutter. They found him, as has been said, perfectly insensible, but after examining him carefully they could find no broken bones, except that of one of his arms. What to do with him they could not at first think. Smugglers and poachers are only human beings after all, and they bore Mutter personally no ill will. To leave him there to his fate was not to be thought of. To get him down the face of the cliff by the steep and secret path they had made for themselves to the place where they moored their boat, was a difficulty. This boat was a fishing boat belonging to a man who lived in a hut close to the shore, and who was secretly in league with them, but who absolutely refused to run the risk of concealing either the men or their contraband spirits and tobacco in his hut ; and hence the necessity for a more secret meeting place and hiding place, and this they had cunningly

contrived in the little cavern well away from the shore, the approach to which they had managed to change so often that there was no appearance of a regular path to it. As to the boat, though Mutter suspected its owner he could as yet prove nothing against him, and so there it remained unmolested, ostensibly used only for fishing purposes, but serving other and less lawful ones occasionally. The object of the men that night was a longer expedition than usual. The boat, which was a large one, was prepared as if for some hours of night fishing; and while its real owner put out his lights and locked himself carefully into his cottage—determined to be deaf and dumb and blind if any neighbour, or tramp, or coast-guard should come knocking at his door—Humphrey Bury and Jonathan Sidbould, the two south-country unworthies in question, were to take her out some miles to meet a certain other boat that they guessed

would have important communications to make to them. But first the coast-guard who walked the coast between Liaston and Culve, must be well away towards the latter place. They were not near enough to hear a foot-step on the cliff distinctly enough to recognise it, but they reckoned by time. They knew when he started to a minute, and were in readiness to scramble down as soon as they were sure he had passed the spot. Great was their dismay when he fell down on them not dead, which would have simplified matters, but merely stunned. Humphrey Bury was young and wild, and possessed of a rooted aversion to getting his own living in the peaceful and monotonous state of life into which, as his catechism taught him, it had pleased God to call him. But except in poaching frays when his blood was up, he was as good-hearted a young fellow as was compatible with his wild, unruly character.

Jonathan Sidbould was a wary-looking, wolfish man, who pocketed by far the lion's share of the proceeds of their transactions, a good deal older than Humphrey, and capable of being cruel on occasions, but in broad daylight, and when kindness was better policy than cruelty, Jonathan so conducted himself as to be looked on as rather a tender-hearted sort of fellow by men in his own class.

'Whatever is us to do wi' he?' demanded Humphrey, scratching his thick black-haired head in perplexity.

'Us is bound to take he along,' responded Jonathan gravely after mature deliberation, 'them Frenchies 'll take he off wi' em, but look 'u here, Humphrey, whatever 'ee does, *mind as 'ee keeps on the black mask*, 'twould be bad luck if Joe Mutter was to catch a sight o' your mug or mine neither when he comes to, as he's bound to come to.'

It must have been a deadly stunning

indeed that would have held out against the jogs and jolts, and stumbles of the two men, as, in accordance with Jonathan's decision, they struggled with their heavy burden down to the boat. Several audible groans announced that Mutter still belonged to the land of the living, and a prolonged series of groans as he was deposited at last not without some rough tenderness on the nets at the bottom of the boat, so alarmed Jonathan that he knelt down beside the groaning man, and scandalised the more gentle heart of Humphrey by saying to Mutter in a hard emphatic voice,

‘ Now listen to me, Joe Mutter, this here arm o’ yourn’s broke to bits (a distinctly untrue statement) and you can’t do nothin’ agin we. Just ’u swear to me as ’u’ll never mention we nor this here boat, or us ’ll take ’u out to sea an’ leave ’u there, my man, us will ! ’

To which adjuration Joe had only replied .

by a vague stare, another groan, and a pettish request to 'stow that, Dorothy, lass !'

Upon which Jonathan had risen chuckling to his feet, and, merely remarking to Humphrey that 'the chap's senses were clean away, and so much the better for we,' had exerted all his energies to getting off the boat. The more compassionate Humphrey did his best to put the wounded arm into as easy a position as possible, and after a second or two Joe relapsed into a half-sleeping, half-unconscious state that the slight concussion of the brain consequent on his fall induced. For several days he was more or less unconscious, and had afterwards no recollection of anything that had taken place or of any faces he had seen. Everything was blotted out of his memory from the moment of his fall till he returned to perfect possession of his senses, and found himself on board a small

French coasting vessel, off what appeared to be nothing but a fishing village on the Normandy coast. He discovered afterwards that this was by no means surprising, as even now in some parts that coast is ill-protected, the douaniers underpaid and overworked, and the people disinclined to inform against their own black sheep. He was almost immediately landed, and had the sense to refrain from remarks of any sort, except hearty thanks for the care and kindness that the French sailors had bestowed on him. He spoke his thanks in English, and they replied to them in French, but that was immaterial, as they seemed thoroughly to understand one another, and parted with mutual goodwill. One of the men on board had by good luck some rough knowledge of surgery acquired in better days, and had done his best for the wounded arm which, thanks to its owner's healthy constitution, was not by any means

past redemption by the time they got him ashore, and into the hands of the regular doctor. The particular black sheep who knew something of surgery, was the son of a small farmer who lived beyond the village and to whose tender mercies Mutter was handed over with a recommendation from the ne'er-do-well son, the *ci-devant* doctor, who was naturally the most influential member of the farmer's family, to look after him till he was well again, and then to turn him adrift to shift for himself. Joe's 'taking ways' won the goodwill of the women, and they nursed him so tenderly that he was soon able to think about the best way of getting back to England. The story of his recovery, his gratitude, and his involuntary love-making to the smuggler's pretty sister would take too long to tell. It is only necessary to state that the latter stage of feeling was not sincere enough to make him wish to linger in Nor-

mandy. Without money, his only chance of getting back was to work his way there, and his only chance of getting work to do was not to be too particular as to the quality of the work, or the character of the company on board the first boat that was willing to take a seaman across to England, who had only one working arm, and had just recovered from a bad fall. The boat in question 'happened' to be going to the south coast of England, for what purpose Mutter made no enquiry, and as to which the skipper made no communications. He seemed, however, to have no sort of objection to put in at Liaston, of which place he possessed apparently some knowledge. He accounted plausibly enough for himself; he was going on to Plymouth to take up some timber that was waiting to be shipped, a very small load that he had undertaken to carry over for a consideration, and had put in to Liaston solely on account of the

Englishman he had on board, to whom he had offered a passage over partly for what he could do, and partly trusting to his word that he should be remunerated when he landed him at Liaston ; and under the circumstances Millar saw fit to credit his statements, and was not too minute in his enquiries. Mutter of course had nothing to say concerning the way in which he had been carried across to France. He simply stated the facts, and hazarded a conjecture that that night when he was watching he was on the right trail, which of course led to a subsequent examination of the place of the most minute kind. But nothing was discovered except the small cavern below the ledge. Every trace of anything suspicious had been carefully removed. Not even a broken pipe or any tobacco ash was visible. The hut of the fisherman was also carefully examined, but the result was equally unsuccessful, and the man professed

himself highly indignant at the unconcealed suspicions of the coast-guards who visited and carefully inspected his house and belongings.

Humphrey and Jonathan had neither of them any inclination to run any unnecessary risks, and had at once abandoned the place, and removed all sign of the uses it had been put to. Humphrey, the younger misdoer, was beginning to think better of his evil courses, and this last strong hint that he and Sidbould would be well looked after in future gave him food for thought of an unpleasant kind. His partnership with Sidbould was not a lucrative one, and after many hesitations he at last made up his mind to dissolve it and reform. Jonathan was too old to do better, but he dropped the smuggling, and took to poaching pure and simple for the rest of his days. Long years after his death, when Humphrey was an old and respectable member of society, he told the story to a few

persons as a great secret, and in this way it eventually became known to the only people interested in the matter, how it was that Mutter had so completely disappeared. Till then it was only guessed at; but both Gray and Mr. Eveleigh knew enough fully to satisfy them. Joe was restored to his own; and with him peace had come to them both. From Angus was lifted the burden of lost friendship and of evil report, from Mr. Eveleigh the burden of remorse; both were saved from the pain and grief that Mr. Eveleigh's proposed confession must have brought to them. And Nell: was she only happy because her father was once again his old self, free from care and trouble, and that her confidence in his honour had been fully justified? The heart of a young girl like Nell Eveleigh seems to be an inscrutable mystery to itself, for Nell would have honestly answered this question in the affirm-

ative ; and would have accounted to herself for the gladness that filled her heart as she remembered Gray's devotion for ' us,' as her father put it, by the justification that devotion had brought of her friendship for him, and of the belief in the goodness and nobility of character that had first attracted her to him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

'CURGENWEN'S WAY.'

THE news of Mutter's re-appearance, though it had spread like wild-fire through Liaston, had not yet reached Tremore when Ralph ordered his horse the next morning with the intention of going to the cottage and getting his interview with Mr. Eveleigh over, and so relieving his own mind. He started quite early, and went straight to the cottage, arriving about eleven o'clock. Mr. Eveleigh was at home, and was expecting him, the servant told Mr. Curgenwen, and led the way immediately to the little study. The doors of the other rooms in the cottage were carefully shut, and he could not catch a glimpse of

Nell ; but as he passed one of them, that of the dining-room, he thought he heard voices and talking. There was no one in the study when he went in to it, and he had leisure to collect his thoughts and think of what he would say. But he had scarcely seated himself when he became aware that the picture he so well remembered as standing with its face to the wall had been brought out and placed on the easel, in the best possible light, and, if he might judge by the palette and brushes in a stand close to it, had been again taken in hand. The sight of the man who was so obnoxious to him as the central figure of a picture painted by the father of the girl he was engaged to marry annoyed Ralph so much that he could think of nothing else. He was standing before it absorbed in angry contemplation of the 'splendid face,' when Mr. Eveleigh entered the room and came to his side quickly, saying, without any preliminary

hand-shaking, 'Well, Mr. Curgenwen, how do you like it now? I have been at work at it for an hour or so this morning, but I fail in the expression; it is scarcely noble enough for a hero. What do you think?'

'I should have thought, after what I told you about the fellow, you might have preferred to put a knife through it, instead of setting it up here again, much less trying to make a hero of him!' exclaimed Ralph.

Mr. Eveleigh smiled slightly as he took up his palette and brushes, and, pointing to the only easy chair the room contained, said,

'Sit down, Mr. Curgenwen, won't you? You will excuse my going on with my work while we talk? It has been laid aside so long, and I am rather enthusiastic about—the "fellow" just at present.'

Ralph seated himself sulkily, and Mr. Eveleigh remained standing before the easel, putting in a touch here and there for appear-

ance sake, while in reality he was only pretending to be unable to leave off working for the sake of provoking Ralph.

‘You wanted to see me this morning, my daughter told me,’ he began carelessly; ‘I hope it is not very important business. I am not a man to be of much use in advice about the yacht, which I heard you wanted to sell.’

‘Yes; I was thinking of selling her. The fact is, I am thinking of settling . . .’ said Ralph, uneasily. ‘Did Miss Eveleigh not tell you what I was coming about?’ he blurted out at last.

There was a slight pause, and then Mr. Eveleigh said slowly, not looking at Ralph, but at the picture, with his head a little on one side, as if to note the effect of a stroke,

‘Well, to be candid, my daughter did tell me one or two things which surprised me a good deal.’

‘I don’t see what there is to be surprised

at,' said Ralph quickly and bluntly; 'though you always speak of Miss Eveleigh as if she were a child, it is true, you must have expected something of this sort to come on with such a pretty girl as she is!' and he made an effort to laugh, but he began to be nervous, and it failed.

'My daughter is very little more than a child. She is only seventeen,' said Mr. Eveleigh.

'I beg your pardon, though no doubt you ought to know best,' interrupted Ralph, with another laugh; 'but she told me herself she was nearly eighteen—quite old enough to be married.'

'But scarcely old enough to be allowed to sacrifice herself to a man she does not like in order to save her father from some possible unpleasantness, Mr. Curgenwen,' interposed Mr. Eveleigh quietly; but though he spoke softly and low, an unmistakable accent of

contempt accompanied the glance of disdain he allowed to rest for a moment on Ralph's perturbed countenance.

‘What do you mean?’ he exclaimed, starting up, and the colour changing from red to yellow in his dark face. It was impossible that Nell should have told her father of the means that had been used to obtain her consent. Surely it was impossible, he thought. And as for the moment Mr. Eveleigh did not reply, he went on hurriedly, unconsciously contradicting himself in his anxiety,

‘She is too young to know her own mind, and I don't complain that she is not desperately fond of me; and I must say I thought you would have been pleased to see her mistress at Tremore, after what you said about the place, and I know she will do anything you ask her to do . . . I need hardly say,’ he added, with some genuine feeling and a more kindly light coming into his eyes, ‘that I would try to make her happy.’

Mr. Eveleigh looked over at him in some astonishment, and a little vexation at finding that the man he fully intended should smart under his contemptuous treatment *had* a heart after all. Yet he did not hesitate to revenge himself and Nell ; and it is only fair to him to believe that under no circumstances, not even if Ralph had been prepared to swear that Mutter met his death by Mr. Eveleigh's hand, would he have hesitated.

'I forget what I may have said about Tremore, but I will try to remember while I explain myself that I have a great admiration and respect for your sister, Mr. Curgenwen. You are quite right in supposing that my daughter will do anything to please me, and I have told her that nothing on earth will induce me to allow her to keep a promise extorted from her by empty and cowardly threats against me. Nothing would please me less than to see her mistress of Tremore

with you for her husband, Mr. Curgenwen. I hope I make my meaning quite clear ?’

‘ By God ! you shall pay for your insults !’ roared Ralph, blazing into a sudden and violent passion, and, coming up close to Mr. Eveleigh, he peered into his face maliciously. ‘ Empty threats ! You’ll see if they were empty ones ! Who was it that struck Joe Mutter over the face, and knocked the lantern out of his hand, *thinking he was Angus Gray*, will you tell me that, Mr. Eveleigh ? Who was it that fought with the man, till you were both mad with rage ? Who was it who pushed him over at last, thinking to be rid for ever of Angus Gray, who’

‘ Stop there a moment,’ interrupted Mr. Eveleigh, in a voice of quiet command. ‘ If you were on the spot at the time that all this occurred, Mr. Curgenwen, *as I see you must have been*’—and he made an intentional pause, and looked keenly at the purple angry face

that had come so close to his own. The effect was instantaneous. The hand that Ralph had raised in a threatening manner dropped to his side, the angry blood fled back to his heart, and left him white to the lips, and he stood staring at Mr. Eveleigh with such terror in his black eyes, that the other looked away in simple disgust at his cowardice, and continued his sentence—'if, as I say, you were there, you will know that I did *not* push the man over; that it was as pure an accident as ever happened.'

Ralph was a second or two before he recovered himself. Then he said savagely,

'Accident or no accident, the man's dead, and you know as well as I do, through your fault; and I'll take care—I'll take care other people know it too!' and as he spoke Ralph made a stumbling step towards the door. Even in his rage Mr. Eveleigh's calmness

struck him with wonder and a sort of admiration.

‘Wait just one moment,’ said the latter, going before him to the door, and, crossing the passage, he put his head into the dining-room, saying, loud enough for Ralph to hear,

‘Come and show yourself to another old friend, Mutter. Mr. Curgenwen would like to shake hands with you before he goes.’

And to Ralph’s speechless astonishment, a wonder so great that it cooled his rage in an instant, Joe Mutter stepped forward smiling and pleased to offer his hand in simple good faith and gratitude to Curgenwen of Tremore. What could Ralph do but take it, and stammer forth an enquiry, which sounded very unlike a congratulation, as to ‘What the devil he meant by coming alive again so soon?’

But Joe only took it for ‘Curgenwen’s way’ of welcoming him, and thanked him

kindly, and hastened to tell his tale for about the fiftieth time since his return, condensing it ably by practice, and as usual omitting all mention of the quarrel. While he listened, Ralph had time to think.

'The game's up,' he said to himself, glancing over Mutter's shoulder into the room beyond, and seeing that Gray was there too. They had come up together, according to Mr. Eveleigh's desire, that Mutter should tell his story himself, and it was just finished when Ralph arrived. Nell of course was there, excited and eager, and so happy that she almost felt as if she could have forgiven Ralph. She was coming forward with some intention of holding out her hand to him, when she encountered his eyes, and suddenly recollected the last time they had met, and with a hot blush and an angry light in her own eyes, deliberately turned away, and walking to the window, stood with her back to them,

and took no further notice of Ralph. But the girl's generous heart reproached her; the man was a coward; he had threatened her, but after all he loved her. Nell could not but think he loved her, and, if only he had not kissed her, she felt that it was in her to forgive him. Ralph was stung to the heart by her slight. Hastily assuring Joe that he was delighted to see him, and it was the queerest story he ever heard in his life, he gave a comprehensive nod all round for the sake of appearances, which by that time he was collected enough to remember and respect, and turned away. Mr. Eveleigh, who also had a regard for *les convenances*, civilly conducted him to the gate, but did not think it necessary to shake hands with him or make any further remark. A small boy was walking Ralph's horse up and down in the lane. They beckoned to him, and just before it came up, Ralph had his last innings.

‘Look here, Mr. Eveleigh; you know best whether you really mean this refusal—but . . . take my advice and think over it. You might have to marry her to that coast-guard fellow after all.’

For one moment Mr. Eveleigh looked at Ralph as if he would like to murder him. Then he said quite quietly, and with a curious smile,

‘I *would* rather marry my daughter to a gentleman upon the whole, as you suggest.’

Ralph turned crimson.

‘And there’s another thing I’d like to say. After this you can’t expect me to stand quietly by while you make love to Ava; and as for letting you marry her, two can play at putting a spoke in that kind of little game, as you’ll find,’ he said in a hard, harsh voice, and with a loud, vulgar laugh that jarred Mr. Eveleigh’s delicate nerves all over. Then, without waiting for an answer, he mounted

and rode off. But he might have waited for ever without getting one. It was Mr. Eveleigh's turn to be reduced to absolute and astonished silence. He stood by the gate and looked after Ralph till he turned the corner into the high road, and then he recovered his speech so far as to be able to ejaculate with vehemence and unction the one only word that he felt applicable to the occasion, 'CAD!'

CHAPTER L.

NELL'S FAREWELL.

RALPH'S remarks, disgusting and beneath contempt, as he affected to consider them, were nevertheless the influencing causes of a determination Mr. Eveleigh was very quick in coming to ; and that was that he and his daughter must leave Liaston. The place had become hateful to him in consequence of all he had suffered in it, and now matters were complicated, since he was supposed to be making love to Miss Curgenwen. He, Harold Eveleigh, was actually supposed to be such a fool as to wish to marry again ! The very idea of it filled him with consternation and terror. It was hard upon Ava certainly,

poor thing, if . . . but here Mr. Eveleigh pulled up his thoughts. He had no reason, he considered, to suppose that she had ever thought of him at all except as a pleasant acquaintance ; and he knew that he had never spoken a word that implied more than the emptiest compliment to her. But if by any chance she had misunderstood, as her brother evidently had done, his pleasure in her society, the sooner he put time and space between himself and her fancies the better. And for Nell's sake it was best that they should go. The two men who loved her were alike at the present moment impossible acquaintances. Mr. Curgenwen he had himself willingly insulted ; and much as he was inclined to like Angus Gray, he was determined that the unequal friendship must cease. This he could not accomplish if he remained at Liaston ; Nell's will was too strong, and her innocent disregard of conventionalities too pronounced

for him to make way against them without opening her eyes to things that he wished her to remain in ignorance of. Thus flight was the only resource left to him, and he lost no time in communicating his purposes to Nell, making all remonstrance impossible to her by frankly telling her that he could never again be happy in a place where he had suffered so acutely. When he first suggested it she was not very unhappy at the idea of change. To get way from Ralph Curgenwen, and to have no longer a fear and jealousy of the pretty Ava was much to set against leaving old Farley and her friend Angus Gray. She set about the packing up without too severe a pang of regret ; and it was not till the time came when she had actually to go to make her farewells to her few friends that she thoroughly realised what was befalling her.

The decisions of Mr. Eveleigh were always speedily acted upon, and in a week from the

time of Mutter's reappearance, before almost the excitement about him had quite naturally died out, it was suddenly completely extinguished by the news of the Eveleighs' departure. The comments were many and various and mostly condemnatory. 'Just when we were getting to know them a little better!' exclaimed the spinsters regretfully. 'Looks like running away!' said the censorious who disbelieved in Nell's guileless friendship. 'However, it's clear there's no truth in her engagement to Curgenwen!' remarked the fathers and mothers of unmarried daughters to each other with consoling reflection. 'Very sensible of Eveleigh, all things considered, though we're all very sorry to lose them both!' said the charitable.

But the person who ought to have felt it most was the one who, though he said nothing, was most honestly convinced of the wisdom of the step. It was better for everybody's

sake that she should go away, Angus said to himself sincerely; and curiously enough he was not inconsolably miserable. It was something that she was to be parted completely from Curgenwen of Tremore. It was certain that, knowing as he did the gossip that had arisen, he could never see her as long as she stayed at the cottage. It was best that he should have a chance of proving the truth and lastingness of his love; best of all it would be if he could quite forget her; but this he knew would never be, even while he half hoped it. She was going away, and he was not miserable! That was the most incomprehensible part of it all. Perhaps a conversation that he had held with her father had something to do with this. Yet it was little Mr. Eveleigh had said except that he saw no reason why Gray should not rise high in his profession, and that he held himself bound to use all the influence in his power to that

end. Ambition that had long slumbered in Gray woke at the call of Love. It was right that he should give a reason for the hope that was in him, by rising to the social level of the lady he loved. To drag her down to his was simply impossible, and this conviction had now become a settled fact in his mind. But with all these vague hopes and aspirations it was hard to him when it came to the actual moment when she must pass away to other scenes and other influences, and he knew that he must let her go and make no sign.

Nell's good-byes were all done in one day. She began with the person she cared least for, Ava Curgenwen, and yet some sympathetic instinct made the girl's eyes fill with compassionate tears as Ava, with a face white and strained, and dry tearless eyes, clasped her to her poor sorrowful heart and bade 'God bless her,' and whispered an entreaty as if her life hung on the answer 'that Nell would write

to her sometimes, and would not quite forget her !' And Nell promised, and kissed her back again, with a fervour that surprised herself, and said to herself when she had gone away, ' Poor Ava ! poor Ava !' guessing at the truth. Ah ! yes, it *was* hard upon Ava. First love, so late, and unrequited ! Yet, if she could only have known it, how much better to go down to her grave with the sweet tender regrets for possible happiness, and a heart that thrilled at every memory of her lost love, a heart that would be full and not empty to the last day of her life, than to have united herself to the worn-out heart of Harold Eveleigh and have suffered the disillusion that his weak affection for her would have brought, and the disenchantments his selfish, pleasure-loving nature would have thrown over her one romance. Poor Ava ! And yet not altogether to be pitied, for in the end her placid disposition would regain its ascendancy ;

and Miss Curgenwen of Tremore would to her last moment be a first instead of a secondary consideration to her friends, and a source of tender, loving care to Ralph, who would keep his word to 'make it up to her.'

After Miss Curgenwen, Nell went to Farley, and her feelings having been much lacerated by Ava's grief, she utterly discomposed that worthy by sitting down in his own chair, and crying bitterly in a simply childish way that went to his heart. Nell's tears came oftener now than they used to do. The troubles and fears and anxieties of the last few weeks had told upon her physically. John said, 'Don't 'ee now, don't 'ee now,' ineffectually and beseechingly several times, and at last, at his wits' end, he laid his hand on hers, and said solemnly, 'Miss Nell, I'm thinkin' it's all for the best. Just see now! here's my poor lad Ralph as you *won't* have nothin' to say to, and there's poor Gray—and a noble fellow is

Gray, that's proved, for I've heer'd the whole story from Ralph hisself, and I'm not for denyin' of it—but, howsomdever, there's him as I was a sayin' as you *can't* have nothin' to say to ; and there's poor Miss Ava, who ought to ha' known better at her years . . . but that's neither here nor there. Don't cry, missy, don't ee' now, or I'll have to say as there's *me* as is and always was over head and ears in love wi' you myself !' and Farley chuckled grimly, though he drew his coat sleeve over his eyes at the thought of losing the girl. He could not have taken a better way of stopping Nell's tears. When he began she checked them to listen, and then as he proceeded they stopped of their own accord. A bright colour came into her cheeks and a light into the midst of the tears in her eyes, and then a revelation of something that she had never till that moment understood. She turned her head away that Farley might not

see her face, but when he had finished speaking she turned it round again and rising suddenly to her feet she put up her arms round the old man's neck and kissed him quickly, and without another word ran away, 'Why can I not ? why can I not ?' she said to herself, half understanding, half doubting. She knew why nevertheless, for she did not go on, as she had intended, to say good-bye to Mrs. Gray. Instead she turned her feet to her home, remembering as she did so that it was the last time she would ever pass through 'the valley' that had been so dear to her. Already in her young life she must begin to count the days that were past, the 'had beens' that she had scarcely noticed when she was in the midst of them. She stood by the stile that ended the cliff walk and remembered them sadly now, leaning her elbows on the top of the stile, and looking wistfully away over the green foreground to the sea. How changed everything was since

that day when she had first seen Mr. Curgenwen and Ava, the latter at Farley's house, and the former when he passed her as she was gathering the berries and leaves, the day so long ago now when Angus Gray had seemed to despise her friendship, and had made an excuse to leave her when she had scarcely spoken to him ! A little tender smile turned up the corners of Nell's beautiful lips as she remembered how angry she had been that day. She knew now that it was only seeming, his rejection of her friendship ; for had he not proved since then how much he could do and bear for her sake. And her father only said that it must be that he had ' good blood in his veins ! ' Nell, the radical, the people's friend, held up her stately head, and even in the solitude grew red with indignation. Good blood ! had that hindered Mr. Curgenwen from conducting himself like a scoundrel ? Was there no such thing as a human being

who owed his pure heart, his truth, his honour, his uprightness, his goodness to something higher and nobler than a long descent ? Is not he the best gentleman, even according to the wisdom of the proudest race on earth, who is the son of his own deserts ? Nell was very sure that she disdained entirely the suggestion that Angus, who had suffered so much and so willingly for her sake, might be a gentleman. And yet she was vaguely conscious that in her thoughts she set him quite apart from his surroundings. Even Mutter, whom she could see for herself deserved the affection that Gray bore him, did not seem to her in the very least fit to be his friend. But that she considered was not because Angus was not Mutter's equal, or *vice versa*, but simply and solely because in her eyes he was in himself a much more noble and superior being than the ordinary run of humanity. Why he was—yes, it was no

use shirking the fact—he *was* truer and nobler and more high-principled than her father even ! His notions of honour were higher if he called them by different names and spoke of his ‘duty’ where her father used the grander sounding word, ‘honour.’ And in his face, and in his whole bearing, there was the something that distinguishes from the lower souls who have not that natural courtesy and charity that suffers long, and is kind and thinks no evil, nor vaunts itself unseemly. ‘A real man,’ as Nell used to put it in her discussions with her father, was Angus Gray, it seemed to her. No counterfeit coin, but pure gold that might be, and had been, tried by fire. And when it dawned on her that it was more than friendship that she had given to this son of the people, Nell felt no shame. He was the noblest she had seen. Why should she not love, and glory in loving, the noblest ? Was she to be faithless

to every generous impulse of her heart, and despise his love, because of the mere accident of his birth and occupation ? Nell, it must be confessed, was very ignorant, and very much inclined to believe that she was much above other young women in holding these views and opinions. And it did not occur to her that they were particular and not general opinions, and that it was more by luck than good guiding that she had come across a man like Gray. Thinking these thoughts, and longing to say good-bye to this hero of hers, and yet knowing well that *now*, now that she knew, she could not go to him and tell him that she grieved to leave the place where his life was set : she forgot time and forgot that she was going home, and stayed long by the stile at the entrance of the valley. As the short day went down the deepening twilight found her still there, and how long she might have remained it would be hard to say if a

small childish voice had not interrupted her reverie with a

‘ Please I wants to get through,’ and Nell, startled and recalled to actual life, made way for a very small boy to pass. It was little Tom, the innocent cause of all the evil speaking that had wrought so much mischief; but Nell did not know anything about the false reports.

‘ Good-bye, little Tom,’ she said kindly, feeling a sudden affection for the child rise up at the thought that she would never see him again.

‘ I’s be sorry,’ said the boy, staring at her with his big round eyes; ‘ an’ more’n me ’ll be sorry. Father gied me a wallop in’, he did ! ’

‘ Oh ! Tommy, what for ? You haven’t been a naughty boy, have you ? ’ demanded Nell, with interest.

‘ I’s be meanin’ ’bout tellin’ Miss Farley

you was a speakin' to Gray long time gone, by that rock you'll mind. 'Twarn't no harm as I could see, but he walloped me for tellin' *he* did. Noa, I beant a bad lad, I don't think,' added Tom, consideringly, 'an' I'se be sorry you be's a goin, I be's.'

Nell's colour deepened considerably, and a very uncomfortable feeling of something wrong came over her that she did not understand. She took some money out of her pocket, and bestowed it on the child, and patted his head, saying kindly,

'There was no harm that I can see either, Tommy; tell your father I said so, and that he is not to whip you any more—and—and that's all, good-bye, little Tom.'

'Good-bye,' repeated Tom, but his eyes were now eagerly fixed on the coins in his hand with delight and astonishment. 'Whatever 'll father say. I reckon he'll not be wallopin' of me now,' and without further

farewells the young ungrateful turned round, and passing again through the stile set off as hard as he could run back to his home to show his money.

Nell smiled and went her way. What was little Tom's greed to her? Yet he was one of 'the people,' and as nice a boy as there was about Liaston, and not really ungrateful, only surprised and confounded by the sight of more money than he had ever possessed in his life, and really proving his goodness by making off with it directly to the people he cared most for, and who needed it more than himself. Why had he been punished for saying he had seen her speaking to Gray? This was the problem that occupied Nell all the way down the lane, and so deeply that she did not notice that some one was coming after her with quick footsteps, and Gray himself was by her side, and obliged to speak to her before she

observed him. She started and blushed crimson when he spoke with gentle reproach.

‘Miss Eveleigh, are you going away without a good-bye to my mother or me? Farley told me just now when I passed that you were going to-morrow.’

‘Yes,’ said Nell, ‘to-morrow!’ and not another syllable could she utter. She was close at home, and they walked on in silence to the gate, and then Angus, looking very white and determined, said desperately,

‘I’ll be hearing about you sometimes. Mr. Eveleigh is very kind, he thinks there’s a hope that I shall rise in the service, he says he has influence and will use it for me—and you—and you—shall I have *your* good wishes, Miss Eveleigh? and will you ever think that you once said you were glad to be my friend?’

The appeal restored to Nell her voice.

‘I am glad *now*. How could I forget?’

And, oh ! I have never thanked you enough for what you bore for—for—*us*,' said Nell softly, 'and—yes, of course, you shall hear of us; and did my father *really* say that?' she asked with a light shining all over her face.

Angus smiled, though his lips quivered.

'He *really* did, and if you—if you will wish me godspeed, it shall come true; and before long too,' he added with determination.

'Good-bye!' said Nell hurriedly, holding out her hand and turning very pale.

He took the hand in his, and held it boldly, while he repeated his entreaty,

'Wish me success.'

Then Nell raised her eyes to his and revealed the secret that she had only just herself discovered. Her lips trembled, and she tried twice to answer before any sound came from them. Then she said low and softly,

'I hope—I am *sure* it will come true.

Good-bye!’ A flash of joy lit up Gray’s face with a rare beauty of love and hope.

‘Now, I *know* it will,’ he said earnestly.

Then he dropped her hand, and with another low spoken ‘good-bye,’ let her go. He stood at the gate till she had reached the door, and when she turned and waved her hand to him it was no wretched miserable heart-broken face that she saw, through the mist of tears that dimmed her eyes, looking after her, but the face of a man whose ‘life was rounded with a hope,’ whose will was set, and whose heart was brave to conquer all obstacles that lay between her and his honest true love. And thus they parted ; more in hope than grief.

CHAPTER LI.

CONCLUSION.

THE Eveleighs did not settle again immediately. They went abroad, they went to London, Mr. Eveleigh renewed some old acquaintances, and they made some visits. There were some things concerning the usages of society that after all her father thought it would be advisable that Nell should learn by experience. It was all very well that she should *think* all men and women equal, but he most decidedly wished her to know that she must not act as if they were so, and why, Seclusion had not exactly answered the purpose he expected, and, before he returned to it again, he determined to give himself up to

this new branch of Nell's education—viz., her instruction in conventionalities, such as the meaning and duties of chaperons, the inadvisability of young ladies making friends of the lower orders, and also of the meaning and uses of gossip and of censorious remarks, in keeping the world straight. He thought that a year would be enough in which to teach her to know good and evil, with the world's eyes; and it is certain that by the end of that time she had guessed why little Tom's father had 'walloped' him for saying that he saw her speaking to Gray.

But Nell Eveleigh was a young lady to whom it would not be easy to teach that, even if her own conscience fully justified her, she was nevertheless still doing wrong if she went a hair's breadth out of the conventional grooves that the world had laid down. She called good, good; and evil, evil; not substituting the one for the other. But she

could not see with other eyes than her own, and hers were pure and clear enough to be trusted to distinguish truly. With all her heart and mind she occupied herself with the new interests that were opening up to her, but she did not forget or disavow her old ones. Her views deepened and widened, but did not alter materially. How should they? Could she learn in a year's intercourse with the rich and well-born that the 'world's great wrong' needed no righting for the poor and lowly? Nell would not have been Nell if she had abandoned 'the cause,' as old Farley called it, simply because she found the romance of it to be only a myth of her own creating, and the pressing needs of the people not of the interesting order she had fancied them to be. It was a shock to her to discover that legislation with regard to the sale of spirituous liquors would do more for their advancement than the introduction of

refined ideas on taste into their education, for instance. But she did not instantly therefore conclude that the bulk of the people were ruffians and drunkards, and turn away from them with disgust. Nell's great desire, the fundamental element of her nature, was for justice and fairness, and she was always inclined, young as she was, to judge both sides of a question. It was in fact this sense of fairness that, having displayed itself in a remark that she made to her father about the space of a year after they had left Liaston, caused him to withdraw again from the world.

‘ Father dear, you did not give me quite a right idea of the young men and young women I should meet in society. I find many of them are anything but effeminate, and, far from caring to do *nothing* all their lives, they seem to me to be overwhelmed with the amount of work they try to get through in the course of the day. I know one or two ’

—and here Nell mentioned the names of several of her new acquaintances—‘and they really are *very* interesting, I do assure you.’

That same evening Mr. Eveleigh told her he was longing again to be quiet, and did she think, now she knew better, that she could bear a life such as they had led at Liaston before—before the Curgenwens came back? And Nell had blushed and said softly that those were the happiest days of her life. Thus it came to pass that the father and daughter resumed their lonely life with new experiences to guide them, and in Nell’s case with an ever-brightening hope to shed a light on the loneliest of lonely days. For, in spite of her sense of justice and fairness, she had never allowed to herself that she had seen since she saw Angus Gray anybody who seemed to her to be his superior, or even his equal. To her he was still, and always would be, the highest and noblest. Nell knew, or

thought she knew, that she could have been content if he had chosen to remain in the honourable but humble position he occupied when she was proud to think that he was her friend. But to her father's prejudices something must be conceded. This at least Nell told herself and believed. As for Mr. Eveleigh himself, the idea so brutally suggested to him by Ralph Curgenwen that he might 'have to' marry his daughter to that 'coast-guard fellow after all,' had never quite died out of his mind. Nell's open and unconcealed interest in him continued unabated, and was shared to some extent by Mr. Eveleigh himself. The thought had been in his mind during that year's return to the world, and had seemed to him a sort of safeguard for her against the temptations of the world. Yet he was minded that she should have opportunities of comparing Gray with other men, and should be under no delusions as to the

differences between class and class ; for himself, he clung in self-defence to his conviction that the root of the matter, the first essential of all excellence, 'good blood,' was Gray's by inheritance; and he became more and more convinced of this as time went by, and Angus justified, as Mr. Eveleigh considered, the conclusion even while he strenuously denied the truth of it. For, as he rose in life and in association, his naturally noble manners took on easily the little outside polish they required. And as for his appearance, that, as Mr. Eveleigh had always admitted, never had been otherwise than remarkable, or, as Mr. Curgenwen had expressed it, 'very uncommon for a common man.' Altogether Mr. Eveleigh looked forward without dismay to the prospect of marrying Nell at some far distant day to 'the coast-guard fellow.' The distance of the day was a point in its favour. And while he watched its approaching by

slow degrees, he learned to dread it less, and learned to honour more the man to whom, as he strongly suspected, Nell had given her heart. Meantime he kept his promise, and brought every influence he possessed to bear on Gray's promotion. His exertions were not without success, or perhaps, as Millar said, 'they favour a man like Gray in the service.' At all events, the steps by which Angus rose were quickly mounted, and at the end of a few years the 'distant day' drew near. After speedily passing through the intermediate positions of chief boatman and chief officer, Angus Gray was at length promoted to be inspecting chief officer of a division, with the same rank, position, and emoluments as a lieutenant R.N. in a similar appointment. As far as money was concerned, Angus' success was not anything very great. But Mr. Eveleigh had plenty for himself and Nell, and when once Gray

had raised himself from the rank of petty to superior officer, Mr. Eveleigh accepted him as an equal, and made no further objection to his daughter's choice. Nell had by that time fulfilled the promise of her girlhood, and had developed into a beautiful and stately woman. If she had all the defects of her qualities, if her firmness verged on self-will, her belief in natural goodness on rash credulity, and if her large-heartedness and sense of fairness led her to see too many sides to a question and too easily to 'make allowance' for others, she had on the other hand a perfect immunity from the ordinary defects of young women. Neither vanity nor jealousy, nor any littleness nor spite, entered into the composition of her nature. Even her beauty took a nobler tone from the absence of these weaknesses, and from the calm content that filled her heart when she looked forward. And from the moment when she discovered

the real meaning of her friendship for Angus Gray, she was true to, and gloried in, the love that was to crown her life with the devotion of years.

Mr. Eveleigh never finished his picture. The failure of his plans for happiness at Liaston brought him to the determination never again to set his heart seriously upon any person or any pursuit to the end of his days. And he faithfully kept to these resolves, holding even less exclusively by his love for Nell, as the years brought more clearly to light the differences in their natures, and as he realised that happiness cannot be kept by rules and laws forbidding its flight. He grew if possible more *dilettante*, more various in his hobbies, and more inclined to save himself trouble by yielding to Nell in every particular. And finally he became quite happy and contented under her gentle rule, and if he loved her less jealously, loved her

better, and with more care for her happiness, and, upon the whole, rather less for his own. One at least of his aims was eventually fulfilled, for to the end of his days his pleasures and his comforts were amongst Nell's dearest interests and dearest cares. And sometimes in his most gracious moments he would admit to her that if he had gained a son whom he did not particularly wish for, he had at least not lost the daughter whom he could not have borne to part with.

But amidst much happiness there remained to Nell one serious cross that, with all her tact, she could not hide ; and that was the rooted and intense aversion her father and Mrs. Gray pertinaciously displayed towards each other. To keep them apart, without offending her mother-in-law or wounding her husband, was a problem that would take her all the rest of their lives to solve satisfactorily.

And Ava, the 'pretty Ava!' She was, alas! quite forgotten by her first and only love, and had never even been sketched as the 'Saint' to match Nell's 'Hero!' Thus Ralph's inheritance was safely secured to him at last; and, upon the whole, this was well, for Curgenwen of Tremore was, and always had been, a first-rate landlord.

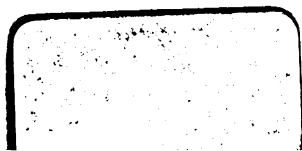
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